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**COMMUNICATING IDENTITIES:
NEW ZEALAND FASHION
DESIGNERS AND CREATIVE
EXPORTS**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Management Studies
at
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Abstract

This thesis investigates how New Zealand fashion designers construct and communicate a unique and fluid identity. There are two main focuses of the research. The first is how New Zealand fashion designers build and maintain a unique brand identity in the New Zealand market. This includes an in-depth analysis of the public relations and communication strategies both emerging and established fashion designers use. The second focus is how New Zealand designers communicate their brand identity to export markets. This includes an examination of how the New Zealand national identity has an effect on the communication of their identity in international markets.

This research is important as there is little scholarly research on the creative industries in New Zealand, and none on the New Zealand designer fashion industry. Therefore, this research study has been developed to advance literature in this area and provide a basis for further research. While this research study will focus on the New Zealand designer fashion industry, it is hoped that the research will be applicable to other creative industries in New Zealand.

A key element of this research is to use the in-depth analysis of the designer fashion industry to provide recommendations on identity management for the New Zealand designer fashion industry and creative industries. Ultimately, this research provides these industries with a practical guide to create and communicate a unique identity in both domestic and export markets.

A collective case study method is used to collate the data and is analysed through an interpretive framework. The New Zealand fashion designers that comprise the case studies are Annah Stretton, Robyn Brooks, Jo Robertson, and Cybèle Wiren.

Key conclusions are that organisations in the creative industries need to put together an in-depth communications plan as early as possible in their business. This should focus on the creation and communication of a unique and fluid identity in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors and allow them to actively respond to their environment. Industries bodies and New Zealand Trade & Enterprise play a key role in the development and export of creative organisations. These organisations need to develop better resources and support systems for the creative industries in order for them to reach their maximum potential.

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CHAPTER 1

Introducing the topic

This research study investigates how New Zealand fashion designers construct and communicate a unique and fluid identity. There are two main focuses of the research. The first is how New Zealand fashion designers build and maintain a unique brand identity in the New Zealand market. This includes an in-depth analysis of the public relations and communication strategies both emerging and established fashion designers use. The second focus is how New Zealand designers communicate their brand identity to export markets. This includes an examination of how the New Zealand national identity has an effect on the communication of their identity in international markets.

This research is important as there is little scholarly research on the creative industries in New Zealand, and none on the New Zealand designer fashion industry. Therefore, this research study has been developed to advance literature in this area and provide a basis for further research. While this research study will focus on the New Zealand designer fashion industry, it is hoped that the research will be applicable to other creative industries in New Zealand.

Within New Zealand scholarly literature, this research study will contribute to the little literature available on identity management in the creative industries. It will also advance research on the relationship between the creative industries and the New Zealand national identity. This thesis will also be a contribution for scholarly research in the designer fashion industry.

For international scholarly literature, this research will contribute to the relatively new and developing field of the creative industries. In particular, it will contribute to the underdeveloped field of fashion public relations. This study will also advance the field of international fashion public relations, which currently focuses on international retailing in the designer fashion industry, not communication strategies for building and maintaining a unique identity in international markets.

A key element of this research is to use the in-depth analysis of the designer fashion industry to provide recommendations on identity management for the New Zealand designer fashion industry and creative industries. This is an important aspect as there is little guiding information available for these industries, let alone that which is based on in-depth and scholarly research. As such, this research will provide these industries with a practical guide to create and communicate a unique identity in both domestic and export markets.

The designer fashion industry

Public relations (PR) literature has identified that communicating a solid and consistent identity to stakeholders is important to the success of an organisation or brand (see, for example, Argenti & Forman, 2002; Balmer & Gray, 1999; Clegg, Rhodes & Kornberger, 2006). The identity and image of an organisation or brand determines the way publics perceive it and can serve to attract or deter stakeholders such as customers, sponsors and investors. The media plays an important role in the construction of an organisations identity and image through the way they portray it to other stakeholders. As such, management of the media's perception of the corporate or brand identity is also critical (Argenti & Forman, 2002; Marconi, 2004).

Fashion public relations is a particular branch of PR that specialises in public relations within the fashion industry. As success in the fashion industry is largely based on brand image, the most crucial element of fashion PR is identity management. In particular, fashion PR focuses on the creation and communication of a unique brand identity. In the saturated fashion market, a unique identity is the main element that fashion designers use to promote themselves (Bridson & Evans, 2004). Because the New Zealand buying market is small, having a well-communicated and unique identity is crucial to gain the support of the minority of people who buy high-end designer brands.

The importance of having a unique identity has been recently highlighted in the New Zealand media when Trelise Cooper, a top New Zealand designer, sued emerging fashion designer Tamsin Cooper for copying her identity. Tamsin Cooper produces a similar style of clothing to Trelise Cooper which, in itself, is not wrong; however, she also created a similar styled website and retail store. As they share the same surname and similar first names, Trelise Cooper's publics were confusing the two designers and their stock. Trelise Cooper had created a unique identity for her brand, and accused Tamsin Cooper of using it to establish herself in the market. She went as far as to take her to the High Court to pursue this. Trelise Cooper dropped the case after two years, with the official media release stating that "as this issue has evolved, and with the significant amount of media attention it has attracted, both feel that customers now have a better understanding between the respective brands" (Gay, 2007). This example demonstrates how fashion designers perceive their unique identity to be a core element of their brand and success. Thus, this research investigates how designers

construct their identity to ensure that it differentiates themselves from competitors and creates a position within the industry field that they can claim as their own.

Fashion design is an industry in which the style of design changes seasonally.

This design change is usually based on current overseas trends and/or trends predicted by fashion design forecasting. Because the fashion designer's collection changes biannually, usually quite considerably, it could be assumed that their image is also affected by each collection. Thus, it is not enough to simply investigate how designers construct a unique identity. Investigation also needs to be undertaken as to how they maintain a continuous organisational identity in response to the fashion publics' demand that they reinvent themselves through their collections bi-annually.

A significant aspect of the designer fashion industry is the export of designer fashion goods. As the New Zealand market is small, fashion designers quickly reach a stage where they need to export in order to grow their business. To be successful in exporting their brand, designers need to engage in effective international public relations and identity management. As such, this research also investigates the public relations and communication strategies New Zealand designers use to successfully export their designer fashion products and brand. This encompasses both the communication strategies used to enter a new market, and those used to build and maintain their identity in current export markets.

Communication is only one aspect that contributes to the success of an organisation in the designer fashion industry. Support from the New Zealand Government and other industry bodies is also crucial to the success of the industry and organisations within it. The majority of designer fashion organisations cannot

create their own label or consider exporting without external help. As such, this research will also investigate the role of Fashion Industry New Zealand (FINZ) and New Zealand Trade & Enterprise (NZTE) in supporting and exporting New Zealand designer fashion.

Providing recommendations

Fashion designers have been largely ignored as a topic for scholarly research in the field of public relations. Indeed, it is only recently that this has become a specialist area in the PR field. Therefore, an investigation into the communication strategies used by fashion designers will be of significant value to fashion designers and fashion PR practitioners. Industry bodies and the New Zealand Government will also benefit from this research through an increased understanding of the support required by fashion designers and other creative industries to successfully build and export their businesses. However, it is not enough for this research to only investigate and discuss areas of communication and support. To be of significant use to the designer fashion and creative industries, it also needs to provide useful recommendations.

Thesis structure

This study has been divided into seven chapters. After the introduction, chapter two provides a comprehensive background of the creative industries in New Zealand with a particular focus on the designer fashion industry. It also includes profiles of the designers that comprise the case studies. These designers are Annah Stretton from *Annah Stretton*, Robyn Brooks from *Ooby Ryn*, Jo Robertson from *Jo Robertson Maternity*, and Cybèle Wiren from *Cybèle*.

Following on from this, the literature review develops a greater depth of understanding of the creative industries and the designer fashion industry through examining scholarly research in these areas. It then discusses how the public relations concepts of identity, image and branding are used by organisations in the creative industries. Finally, it draws on export and international public relations literature to examine how creative organisations and, in particular, designer fashion organisations, effectively use communication strategies to break into new markets. These two chapters are designed to locate this research study in the context of the creative industries and their position in the New Zealand economy.

Chapter four draws from the previous chapters to present the research questions that guide this thesis. It moves on to discuss how these questions will be answered using an interpretive framework, with a focus on interpretive organisational research. The interpretive framework lends itself to the primary data gathering method of semi-structured interviews, which were gathered from four high-end New Zealand fashion designers. This chapter discusses how this data, along with secondary data gathered from a range of sources, will be collated and analysed as collective case studies. The chapter concludes by outlining the difficulties and limitations that have been faced in this research.

To answer the research questions, the next two chapters use the interpretive methodology to analyse the four case studies. They draw from material presented in the background and literature review to examine how New Zealand fashion designers create and communicate a unique identity. Chapter five discusses the communication and business strategies required to develop a fashion label. It then

moves on to examine the strategies used by the designers and their PR firms to create and communicate a unique and fluid brand identity and image.

Measuring the success of the brand is vital for an organisation and as such, chapter six begins by discussing common measures of success the designers use for their labels. It then moves on to analyse the communication strategies fashion designers use when exporting their designer fashion product and brand. With this, the role of NZTE in the promotion of New Zealand designer fashion is examined. Finally, this chapter addresses how the New Zealand national identity affects the designers' international communication strategies and the perception of their brands by international markets.

The final chapter follows from the analysis chapters to summarise the research study and locate the results in terms of the wider context of the creative industries. From this, recommendations are drawn for New Zealand fashion designers, creative organisations, creative industry bodies and NZTE. The chapter concludes by examining how this research study acts as a basis for further research and outlines possibilities for future research in the areas of creative industries, the designer fashion industry and fashion public relations.

CHAPTER 2

Setting the context

This chapter provides a brief but comprehensive background of the creative industries in New Zealand. It then takes a more focussed look at the current position of the designer fashion industry in New Zealand. To do so, it draws on both scholarly literature and grey literature such as websites and newspapers. The chapter concludes with profiles of the four New Zealand fashion designers that comprise the cases for this study.

Creative industries in New Zealand

In 2002, the New Zealand Government formally acknowledged the creative sector as a “leading potential contributor to [the] future economic growth and global positioning of the country” (de Bruin, 2005, p. 2). The New Zealand Heart of the Nation report defines the creative industries as “a range of commercially driven businesses whose primary resources are creativity and intellectual property and which are sustained through generating profits” (Heart of the Nation Working Group, 2002, p. 5). The following industries have been included in the New Zealand definition of the creative sector: advertising, software and computer services (including interactive leisure software), publishing, television and radio, film and video, architecture, design, designer fashion, music, performing arts and visual arts (arts, crafts, antiques) (NZIER, 2002).

The creative industries have been identified as a key sector for New Zealand’s economic transformation because these industries have a huge potential for

growth, both domestically and globally. The creative sector also includes niche industries which are not only vertically integrated entities, capable of standing as an economic industry on their own, but also horizontal enablers. Horizontal enablers are apparent in industries with a basis in design. These industries support other industries through creative outputs such as advertising, web design, product development and innovation, and branding (Smythe, 2005).

Creative industries and the New Zealand identity

It has been widely recognised by scholars that the creative sector draws from, and has the potential to add to, the economic, social and cultural value of a country (see, for example, Bilton, 2007; Santagata, 2005). Further, a strong creative economy can be used as a symbol by governments to highlight the creativity and dynamism of their country's economy across all industries, and to indicate the strength of industrial creativity and innovation (Bilton, 2007). In recognition of this, the New Zealand Government is using the creative industries to cultivate and shape New Zealand's national identity in a time of global economic change. Purposefully, the Government is investing in the creative industries to create an image of New Zealand as innovative, imaginative, intellectual and creative (Heart of the Nation Working Group, 2000).

New Zealand's strategic international brand identity is developed and maintained by Tourism New Zealand. In 1999, Tourism New Zealand launched the 100% PURE campaign. This campaign positioned New Zealand as a young, clean and green country, where tourists can experience unique spiritual places, indigenous culture, innovative products and adventure (Tourism New Zealand, 2008a). Simultaneously, NZ Edge was launched. While 100% PURE is an external

branding campaign, NZ Edge is focussed on the internal branding of New Zealand. NZ Edge is a website that showcases New Zealanders who are achieving success internationally, connects expatriate New Zealanders with each other and with those still in New Zealand, and helps New Zealanders to articulate our identity by defining our uniqueness (NZ Edge, 2007).

The creative industries have been utilised extensively by these campaigns to brand New Zealand. Some of the more recognisable uses have been seen in the images from the Lord of the Rings movies painted onto Air New Zealand aeroplanes, and in the architectural design of the Rugby Ball Venue, an inflatable building shaped like a giant rugby ball that has been put up in Britain. Designer fashion is also used as a marketing tool, as seen during Air New Zealand Fashion Week (ANZFW), when runway shows are performed on international flights into New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2008b).

Creative industries and the New Zealand economy

As of 2001, the GDP of the creative sector in New Zealand accounted for approximately 3.1% of the total New Zealand GDP. This is comparable to that of the communication, finance and education sectors, highlighting the economic significance of this industry (NZIER, 2002). To compare this internationally, the average share of GDP for the creative industries is approximately 5% (Towse, 2003). While the New Zealand share is lower, it is increasing steadily and is expected to reach this 5% figure by 2010.

As of 2001, there were over 100,000 people employed in the New Zealand creative sector, approximately 6.5% of the working population. This figure has

increased by 17% since 1996, much faster than the average workforce increase of 6% (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2006).

Creative industries and New Zealand exports

The creative industries are an important sector of New Zealand exports. As of June 2007, the creative industries export figure was \$2.86 billion. This amounts to 8.5% of New Zealand's total exports (total exports were \$33.4 billion) (NZTE, 2007).

The creative industries in New Zealand share many barriers to export with other New Zealand export industries. These include a lack of time and money to invest in export, the confidence to take such a risk and a lack of specific knowledge and skills (NZTE, 2006a). However, the New Zealand creative industries also face a unique set of export barriers. Firstly, by global standards, the majority of creative New Zealand businesses are small, giving them a diminished capacity to service large international organisations. On the positive side, this lack of size can allow for increased flexibility and the ability to be highly responsive to the operating environment as well as open to opportunities.

Secondly, many creative enterprises do not have, and find it difficult to attract, people with the necessary management skills to grow the business internationally. This is often due to being unable to offer an attractive or competitive salary package and because there is a lack of people with these necessary skills in the creative sector. Finally, there is a lack of "international market intelligence and integration into global value chains" (NZTE, 2006b, p.2) forming a gap in the

knowledge, networks, opportunities and processes that the creative sector needs in order to successfully export.

New Zealand support for creative industries

There are a range of government and industry bodies that support and develop the creative industries in New Zealand. New Zealand Trade & Enterprise (NZTE) is the government body that is the most focused on the creative industries in terms of economics and New Zealand identity. NZTE support the creative industries by designing national and international strategies to develop the industry. These include workshops that aim to increase the skills of businesses within the industry, financial support, organising New Zealand representation at international events, and providing export advice and knowledge to creative businesses (NZTE, 2008). NZTE also produce Market New Zealand, a website that provides New Zealand businesses with information about exporting, and international buyers with information about New Zealand business (Market New Zealand, 2008a).

Three niche sectors in the creative industries have been identified by NZTE to spearhead their global market entry projects. These sectors have been chosen for their currently increasing international recognition, their potential for growth and their ability to positively showcase New Zealand on an international platform. These three sectors are textiles and apparel, screen production and the music industry (NZTE, 2006b). By focusing on these three sectors, NZTE is enabling businesses in these sectors to export with minimised risk and with a focus on the New Zealand identity.

Already, these three sectors have had an impact on international branding. Branding through screen production is most apparent from the huge success of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, which showcased New Zealand talent through the creativity of the production team, including director Peter Jackson, and by utilising local creative businesses such as Weta Workshop. New Zealand music is achieving increasing international recognition in major markets such as the USA, United Kingdom/Europe and Asia Pacific through talented artists such as Hayley Westenra, Bic Runga, Brooke Fraser and Evermore.

The textiles and apparel industry has made an impact through New Zealand participation in designer fashion shows in Australia, London, Paris and New York, with fashion designers such as Karen Walker, World and Zambesi showcasing the dark, intellectual style that New Zealand fashion designers have become known for. This industry has also made groundbreaking advancements in fabric technology, as has been seen with multi award-winning exporter Icebreaker who pioneered clothing made from merino wool.

The New Zealand designer fashion industry

As previously stated, the designer fashion industry has been recognised by NZTE as a key creative industry for economic growth and export. It has also been identified as having the potential to positively contribute to New Zealand's national identity as perceived internationally (NZTE, 2006b; Larner, Molloy & Goodrum, 2007).

The economic value of the designer fashion industry in New Zealand is significant. In 2002, the domestic retail turnover of designer fashion was \$248

million, with exporting contributing another \$41 million (Blomfield, 2002). This equates to 11% of New Zealand's total exports. The majority, nearly 70%, of designer fashion is exported to Australia with the next largest export markets being the United States, United Kingdom, Japan and Hong Kong (Market New Zealand, 2008b). As New Zealand designer fashion has increased in popularity in international markets, many designers have followed the trend set by international fashion designers and have added footwear, jewellery, eyewear and/or accessories to their labels. These additions have also proved to be popular in the domestic market (Market New Zealand, 2008b).

New Zealand designer fashion benefited from increased international recognition due to the film industry. The Lord of the Rings movie trilogy was a huge success internationally and created interest in many aspects of New Zealand, including designer fashion. Hollywood stars from the movie, including Orlando Bloom and Elijah Wood, wore New Zealand fashion labels on the international red carpet, Huffer and Starfish being among their favourites. This received coverage in both national and international media (Fluidica, 2008; Middleton, n.d.; NZ Edge, 2008; Positively Wellington Tourism, 2008; Powell, n.d.).

Industry support for New Zealand fashion designers

Fashion Industry New Zealand (FINZ) is the industry organisation that represents and supports designer fashion and textile firms. FINZ was established in 2002 through funding from fashion related firms and currently has nearly 200 members. FINZ is governed by an elected board of fashion industry representatives including Annah Stretton, fashion designer; Paul Blomfield, consultant; and Mandy Smith, AUT Head of Fashion. FINZ supports New Zealand fashion

designers in various ways including free seminars, business and industry advice and information, and advocating on behalf of the fashion industry (FINZ, 2008).

FashionNZ is a website dedicated to the New Zealand fashion industry and public. It contains information about New Zealand fashion designers, fashion PR firms and fashion job sites, as well as fashion advice, news articles and competitions. Another significant New Zealand fashion website is RunwayReporter.com. This website was created by Stacey Gregg, New Zealand's best known fashion journalist, when she noticed a gap in the market for a website that caters to fashion news and advice. In 2002, Stacey Gregg also released a book, *Undressed*, which contains case studies of 15 top New Zealand fashion designers. This book is the only published book available on current New Zealand designer fashion.

In 2002, Murray Bevan, considered New Zealand's pioneer of fashion public relations, set up Showroom22, New Zealand's first PR agency specialising in fashion. Following this, four other fashion PR firms have been set up, Sarah Paykel Ltd, Coco PR, Mint Condition and Impact PR. These firms differ from other public relations firms in that they have showrooms for fashion designers to display their collections for media, create lookbooks of each seasonal collection, organise runway shows and keep logs of celebrities who publicly wear the garments.

New Zealand has two specialised fashion incubators, Fashion HQ in Wellington, and the Dunedin Fashion Incubator (DFI). These incubators offer emerging fashion designers extensive support to start or grow their business. Once accepted into the incubation programme, designers have access to services such as mentoring, investment opportunities, Cut Make Trim (CMT) firms, business

advice, infrastructure and networking. Fashion designers can either become live-in members in which case they base their business out of the incubator for a period of two years, or they can be associate or part-time members in which case they have access to some, but not all, of the services available. Both of the fashion incubators are not-for-profit organisations and are sponsored and funded by NZTE, local government and local businesses.

Limiting factors of the designer fashion industry

Even with the aforementioned support, the New Zealand designer fashion industry still encounters many limiting factors to growth, development and export. The most prominent of these factors include production and skill shortages. The majority of young people going into the fashion industry want to design and own their own label. This has created a shortage of people to do the production and manufacturing work for fashion labels, for example sewing, warehousing and pattern making. Also, tertiary fashion design courses focus too heavily on the production and design aspect of manufacturing and not enough on the business skills needed to successfully run a fashion company. This results in graduates being able to design apparel but unable to make money from it (Blomfield, 2002).

Emerging designers find it difficult to source retail stockists because there is a limited number of designer retail stores and a large number of designers for these stores to choose to stock. Fashion designers who choose to wholesale can also find it difficult to forge low-risk relationships with retailers. Often retailers will only offer “sale or return” terms. This means that a retailer will only pay for the garments that are sold, returning all others to the designer at the end of the season.

Wholesaling is risky for fashion designers as they have no control over the

marketing of their garments in these stores and must rely on the retailer to promote and sell them. As a result, fashion designers often prefer to open own-brand stores. However, cost can be a large deterrent with high rental costs in trendy areas and a large marketing budget needed (Blomfield, 2002).

Fashion designers encounter a large number of export barriers. These include those of the creative industries export barriers discussed earlier as well as industry specific barriers. Internationally, New Zealand designers face a low recognition of New Zealand being able to produce talented high-end fashion designers. While this is slowly being overcome through a greater number of New Zealand designers achieving international success, it is still a barrier when it comes to attracting international agents to ANZFW and designers liaising with international wholesalers. Another barrier is fit sizes for garments being different in every country, forcing designers to resize their garments depending on where they are being exported. A final barrier is retailing/wholesaling difficulties which come about through factors such as language barriers, different cultural norms for doing business and slow payment for goods (Walker, 2008).

Profiles of designer fashion brands

Four high-end New Zealand fashion designers have been chosen as the cases to be analysed for this research study. These are Annah Stretton for *Annah Stretton*, Cybèle Wiren for *Cybèle*, Jo Robertson for *Jo Robertson Maternity*, and Robyn Brooks for *Ooby Ryn*. The following profiles will provide a brief background of each fashion designer and their brand.

Annah Stretton

Annah Stretton established her first fashion business in 1992. It focussed on mass-produced wholesale garments that were sold through department and chain stores such as Farmers and Kmart. In 1994, she opened her first own-brand store to retail her designs. She continued opening *Annah S* retail stores in major towns and cities across New Zealand. In 2000, she decided to start producing high-end designer fashion and added the label *Frock* to her *Annah S* brand. In 2002, she was accepted to show *Frock* at L'Oreal New Zealand Fashion Week.

In 2003, Stretton rebranded *Frock* to *Annah Stretton*. This decision was made to align the business with the national and international profile Stretton was beginning to build through Fashion Weeks. All of her city stores were rebranded as *Annah Stretton*, although the rural stores were still called *Annah S*. The purpose for this was for the *Annah Stretton* stores to sell the high-end designer fashion and the *Annah S* stores to continue to sell the safer, everyday garments. A third label, *Garb*, was introduced, catering for the fuller figure, and this was sold alongside the other two labels.

All of Stretton's designs are highly recognisable because of their use of feminine fabrics with a lot of embellishment, colour and texture. The *Annah S* label is very frou frou and flouncy, incorporating many different fabrics, layers and embellishment. The *Annah Stretton* label has a cleaner line, while still remaining true to the feminine identity of the brand.

Stretton's 2004 Fashion Week collection *Feral Beauty* enhanced Stretton's profile by attracting a significant amount of both negative and positive media attention. In this collection, Stretton sent models wearing stuffed birds and a boar's head

down the catwalk with the vision of juxtaposing extreme beauty and extreme ugliness. This gimmick earned her front page headlines in newspapers across the country. The media often still mentioned the boar's head in relation to Stretton today, five years later.

Stretton produced another media grabbing show in 2005 when she used four *fa'afafine* (Polynesian boys brought up as girls) models on the catwalk. However, in 2006 she decided to tone the shows down as people were beginning to expect gimmicks from her at every show. She consequently engaged the services of a stylist for her shows and continued to receive positive media coverage.

In 2008, Stretton employed the services of a brand consultant and a PR consultant. Stretton and her brand consultant are working to identify the core identity of the *Annah Stretton* brand. They will then create a communications plan to communicate a consistent identity to all publics. Stretton hired her PR consultant to handle all of the PR for the brand. He is also a stylist and styles the *Annah Stretton* brand for catwalk shows and photo shoots.

Stretton employs 135 women and manufactures all her garments in New Zealand. Her annual turnover is approximately \$10,000,000. Stretton has 30 own-brand stores throughout New Zealand and stockists in Australia, Europe and mid-Asia. She plans to open own-brand stores in both Sydney and Melbourne in 2010. Stretton's export sales currently contribute 20% to overall sales, which she plans to grow to 30%. Stretton has participated twice at Australia Fashion Week, in 2007 and 2008, both times receiving help from NZTE. In 2008, she also participated in an on-site NZTE showroom set up to showcase thirteen New Zealand fashion designers.

Stretton has won a number of business awards. The most significant of these includes the *Air New Zealand Fashion Export Development Award*, which gave her the opportunity to further develop her export markets. She was awarded the *Her Business Business Woman of the Year 2005* and has received an Honorary Masters of Arts by WINTEC (Waikato Institute of Technology) for her contributions to fashion. Stretton also judges a number of fashion and business awards and is Chairperson of FINZ (Fashion Industry New Zealand).

Stretton participates in a number of charitable and community causes including designing a t-shirt to raise money for the Breast Cancer Research Trust, judging school fashion shows, lecturing for the WINTEC Diploma of Fashion Design and Merchandising and producing the biannual Pink magazine of which a percentage of the proceeds are donated to the Breast Cancer Research Trust.

Cybèle Wiren

After completing a Bachelor of Visual Communications at Unitec, Cybèle Wiren gained two years experience in the fashion industry working as a pattern-maker in Melbourne. In 2003, she returned to New Zealand to set up the designer fashion label *Cybèle*.

To help create her label Wiren participated in a fashion incubator, which taught her about the business side of a fashion label and helped her design a business plan. She also attended Government-funded courses through WHK Gosling Chapman, an accounting/business advisory. Wiren received business advice, support and information from the CEO of FINZ and now sits on the FINZ Board. In 2004, Wiren was selected as a *Verge Breakthrough Designer*, through which

Verge gave her funding, training and mentoring to stage a New Zealand Fashion Week show.

The *Cybèle* brand is described as youthful, directional and feminine, with beautiful flattering shapes and innovative cuts. The garments are deceptively simple and it is not until viewed up close that the complexity of pattern making is realised. Wiren uses bold graphic prints, designed in-house, and is known for her use of bright colour. Wiren employs five people and proudly manufactures all her garments in New Zealand. *Cybèle* is stocked in 24 stores throughout New Zealand, 17 in Australia, and 14 in Japan. The label also has stockists in Hong Kong and Dubai. Wiren's exports account for 25% of her sales.

Wiren has used the services of a PR consultant since the conception of her label. He handles all of her PR in New Zealand and provides stylist services for her label. Wiren also employs PR firms in Australia and Japan to handle PR in these markets.

Wiren often participates in charity projects, for example designing a t-shirt to raise money for the Breast Cancer Research Trust, designing a rug to be auctioned with the proceeds going to a charity of her choice, and designing a limited edition cat bowl, the proceeds of which go towards various New Zealand cat charities.

Wiren first showed at New Zealand Fashion Week in 2003 as part of the *New Generation Group* show. Her second group show was in 2004 as part of the *Verge Breakthrough Designers*. She staged her first solo show in 2005 where she secured her first major international wholesale order and has had a solo show every year since. Wiren has developed a set of sponsors that she uses for each

ANZFW show. These include MAC for make-up, Steven Marr for hair, Dirts and Kevin Murphy. Wiren also finds new sponsors every year, for example, in 2008 she partnered with Hellmann Freight and Sunglass Hut, while in 2007 she partnered with Simunovich Olive Estate.

Wiren staged runway shows at Australia Fashion Week in 2005 and 2007. These were both supported by NZTE initiatives. Wiren opted out of a catwalk show in 2008 and instead showcased her collection in the New Zealand Designer Showroom, an onsite showroom set up by NZTE for New Zealand designers. Wiren was awarded the *Air New Zealand Fashion Export Development Award* in 2008, which provides her with the opportunity to further research and develop her export markets.

Jo Robertson

Jo Robertson completed a degree in fashion design at the Wanganui Polytechnic but she never aspired to become a fashion designer. A few years later, in 2003, she became pregnant at the same time as a few of her girlfriends. After finding it difficult to source fashionable maternity wear, Robertson began making clothes for all of them. A local store approached her and asked if they could stock some of her designs and she decided to establish the label *New Life Maternity*. The label is now stocked in 16 stores throughout New Zealand and Robertson employs six staff to manufacture all the garments in New Zealand.

Two years into the business, Robertson decided to change the name to *New Life Clothing* to broaden her market beyond pregnant women. This decision backfired as her core market did not identify with the brand anymore. As a result, the label

underwent another name change to *Jo Robertson Maternity*, which was launched at ANZFW 2008. The purpose behind this is to realign the brand with its core market, pregnant women, and to associate the brand with a more high-end designer feel. A redesigned website and logo was also launched during ANZFW week as part of the rebranding process.

Robertson uses the services of a marketing and communications firm run by a woman who loves and wears *Jo Robertson Maternity* clothing. Instead of paying her the full fee, Robertson has worked out a deal to pay for half the services and provide clothing to make up the other half. The marketing company deals with all press releases and advertising enquiries.

Robertson is currently working with her marketing firm and a mentor from NZTE to design a communications strategy for the brand. She is also participating in a high impact course through NZTE which focuses on getting a brand ready for export. This course, along with help from her marketing firm and mentor, is helping her to write a five-year business plan that she will use to apply for an exporting grant from NZTE.

The brand is stocked in one store in Ireland and Robertson has plans to enter the Australian market in 2009 from ANZFW contacts and through trade shows in Sydney and Melbourne. In 2010, she aims to enter the United States and United Kingdom markets through trade shows. She has considered hiring agents for the US and UK and is currently in discussions with a New Zealand agent in the UK who handles baby products.

Robyn Brooks

Robyn Brooks always wanted to be a fashion designer. However, instead of doing a fashion course she enrolled in a Bachelor of Media Arts majoring in photography. In 2005, during the last year of the course, Brooks set up her own label *Ooby Ryn*, a scramble of the letters in her name. Brooks does not have any employees and contracts out all her manufacturing to local firms.

Brooks' designs are described as romantic, colourful and feminine, with a strong personality and interesting graphic prints that draw from her media arts background. Her designs are differentiated by her use of sumptuous fabrics such as silk and velvet. Each season she ensures that her fabric choices are made exclusive to her so no other designer can use the same fabrics in their collections. Brooks also designs a collection of leather belts each season.

In 2006, Brooks was accepted into the *Verge Breakthrough Designer* programme. This programme was set up by a former fashion designer to help promising young New Zealand designers succeed. Through this programme, Brooks received advice and training in planning a catwalk show, exporting, marketing, budgeting and styling. The programme culminates in a group show at ANZFW for which the programme pays part of the entry fee.

Brooks did not show in 2007 as the cost was too steep and even to be part of a group show would have cost her over \$10,000. Instead, she partnered with other young designers from her PR firm and staged a champagne breakfast for media and buyers the week before ANZFW began. In 2008, she decided once again to show at ANZFW in a group show with other young designers from her PR firm

with the aim of securing further national and Australian stockists to grow her brand.

Brooks had four sponsors for ANZFW 2008, Angel Energy Drink, Canadian Club Whisky, Paul Williams Goldsmith who designed jewellery especially for the show, and Alcabello, a Spanish company who provided handbags for the show. At ANZFW 2008, she introduced leather handbags to her range as well as an eco-friendly range of clothing.

Brooks does not like to talk to the media, preferring that her designs receive the media attention and coverage. Thus, Brooks hired a fashion PR firm in 2007 to deal with all of her PR and media enquires.

Brooks opened an *Ooby Ryn* concept store in her hometown of Cambridge in 2006. The purpose was to have a place where she could offer the complete collection as opposed to just being stocked in other stores which only carry selected pieces of the current range. She also stocks other designers in the store, chosen because they are brands that she wants her brand to be recognised as having the same status. Her parents contributed to the store financially and her mother helps to manage the store.

Ooby Ryn is currently stocked in 21 New Zealand stores and has been stocked in three Australian stores since her 2007 collection. Brooks wants to increase her stockists in Australia and eventually export all around the world. She aims to show at Australia Fashion Week in 2009 by applying for an NZTE grant.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has briefly discussed the make-up and contribution of the creative industries in New Zealand. It has identified the creative industries as a vital branding and promotional tool for New Zealand as well as a growing financial contributor to the New Zealand economy. The designer fashion industry has been discussed in more depth, outlining the government and industry support available as well as the limiting factors the industry currently faces. The chapter concluded with a profile on each of the fashion designers that comprise the case studies for this research.

Following on from this, the next chapter uses scholarly literature to examine the creative industries and the designer fashion industry. This scholarly literature and the material presented in this chapter will be brought together during chapters five and six when the data is analysed and discussed.

CHAPTER 3

Theorising the study

This chapter develops a greater depth of understanding of the creative industries and the designer fashion industry through examining scholarly research in these areas. As there is little scholarly literature available on public relations in the designer fashion industry, the connection between more traditional areas of public relations research is considered to provide a more comprehensive and contextual view of the industry.

This chapter first outlines the social, cultural and economic contributions of the creative industries and then focuses this discussion on the designer fashion industry. It goes on to examine how organisations in the creative industries use the public relations concepts of identity, image and branding to communicate with their stakeholders. Finally, it draws on export and international public relations literature to examine the strategies creative organisations and, in particular, designer fashion organisations, use to communicate to international markets.

The creative industries

There are many definitions of what constitutes the creative industries. It is widely accepted by scholars that the creative industries arose as an amalgamation between the individual creative endeavours of the creative arts and the economic, profit making goal of the cultural industries (Hartley, 2005). More specifically, the creative industries are those that draw on an individual's talents, skills and

creativity to generate intellectual property that forms the basis for wealth and job creation (Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 2001).

While there is some confusion and argument over what industries can be classified as creative industries, Caves (2000) explains that the creative industries provide and supply services and products that are associated with artistic, cultural or entertainment value. Caves, along with most scholars in this field, agrees that the following industries can be classified as creative industries: designer fashion, architecture, art, music, design, film and video, performing arts, publishing, crafts, advertising, broadcasting and software/computer games (Carey & Naudin, 2006; Hartley, 2005; Matheson, 2006; Towse, 2003).

Creative industries and the economy

The creative industries have been identified by many scholars as the new key driver of economic success and as increasingly valuable sources of wealth generation and employment (de Bruin, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Matheson, 2006; Nurse, 2006). They are no longer considered secondary to the real, or traditional, economy; some of these creative organisation are now among the most highly valued and discussed businesses in the world (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). The creative industries have become an integrated part of most current economies, and the traditional economy is being challenged and shaped by the innovative and cultural perspectives that the creative industries bring to them (Cunningham, 2005).

Creative economy versus traditional economy

The idea of a creative economy versus a traditional economy raises the question of how the creative economy differs from the real economy. Scholars argue that the creative economy is unique for a variety of factors. Firstly, products of the creative economy are “risky and subject to radically uncertain reception by consumers” (Towse, 2003, p. 172). It can be hard to predict whether a creative product will be received well by consumers and critics until the product is made and presented to them (Caves, 2002). This can be an expensive exercise if the product is costly to produce, such as a movie, music album or fashion line (as opposed to a painting or handicraft). In the production of these goods, costs are often sunk and thus cannot be retrieved if the product is unsuccessful in the marketplace.

Bilton and Leary (2002) further develop this concept by viewing the creative industries as producers of symbolic goods (images, experiences and ideas) which are made up of symbolic meanings. The value of these products is dependent on how the end user understands and finds value within these symbolic meanings. As such, the value of these goods is dependent on how the end user, not the creator, perceives the product. Thus, the value that the creator sees in the product may not translate into a financial return unless the end user also perceives it as valuable.

Thompson, Jones and Warhurst (2007) suggest that this problem can be countered through the strategy of over-production. Their solution to uncertain demand in the creative industries is to offer the consumer as many products as is economically and logistically feasible for the company to produce. This way, if at least some of the products are purchased, they will compensate for the costs of those not purchased.

A second unique feature of the creative economy is that it is not constrained by resources so it advances at a rapid speed. Unlike natural resources, the products of human creativity (ideas) are “fully exploitable but not exhaustible” (Santagata, 2005, p.83). As an integral part of the knowledge economy, the creative industries are constantly generating new ideas; due to the increasing advancement of technology and societal demand, they are creating, marketing and developing ideas and then repeating this cycle with increasing speed (Flew, 2005).

Thirdly, within the creative industries there is often a high fixed cost of producing the original product. However, copies of this are made at a relatively low cost. This is because the original version of a product involves a large amount of time and usually many individuals to conceive and produce. It also requires costly production materials or infrastructure and needs investment in promotion for it to have a chance at success. With this already in place, copies normally only require the raw materials and minimum labour to produce (Towse, 2003).

Another feature of the creative industries is that they are not self-contained. They rely on a number of industries, such as editors, marketers and retailers for feedback, production and promotion. Such industries are as crucial to the success of the product as is the original creator and without these they would cease to exist as profit-making industries (Bilton, 2007; Caves, 2000, Wilson & Stokes, 2005).

The majority of the crucial industries for the completion of a creative product are traditional industries; for example, a novelist needs a publisher and a fashion designer needs a retailer (Caves, 2000). The differences between these industries often lead to tensions in the process of designing, manufacturing and promoting

the product. This is especially seen in how managers (producers, publishers, marketers, etc.) often want to change the original creative concept or design of the product to make it more appealing to consumers. If the creator does so, they face feeling dissatisfaction with the product, but if they refuse to change it they may lose the people who make the product profitable (Bilton, 2007).

A fifth unique feature of the creative economy is that creative workers often care more about the originality and technical prowess of their product than the financial or social gains that can be attained from the product. As such, they may spend time on features that the consumer will never notice and thus never want to pay extra for (Caves, 2000). This is in stark contrast to the worker in the traditional economy who typically wants to receive financial compensation (or other rewards) for all effort put into a task.

The creative industries do more than just drive economic growth; they also contribute to the social and cultural development of a society through meeting the current needs of society and shaping new needs (Hesmondhalgh 2002; Matheson, 2006). This is evident in today's society where more people are focussed on an experiential life, one that is defined by "intense, high quality, multidimensional experiences" (Florida, 2005, p.134).

Creative exports

In recent years, the creative industry sector worldwide has been one of the fastest growing sectors, experiencing growth of more than twice that of traditional industry sectors (Cunningham, 2005). To illustrate this, during the years 1997-2002 creative exports from the United Kingdom grew at an average of 11% per

annum. This is in comparison to a 3% growth for all goods and services (Jones, Comfort, Eastwood & Hillier, 2004). Worldwide, in 2005, international trade of creative goods totalled US\$445.2 billion. This had an average yearly growth rate of 8.7% between 2000 and 2005 (UNCTAD, 2008).

The globalisation of the creative sector has been vital for the development of the creative industries. The global reach and advancements in technology have created a level playing field within industries by lowering the once differentiating factor of production costs (Santagata, 2005). This suggests that creative organisations need to differentiate themselves instead through the constant creativity and innovation of their products.

It is not only products and technology that are being distributed all over the world. Organisational creativity, that is the ideas and practices of an organisation, also disseminate among countries through conferences, festivals, the internet, strategic alliances and informal communication between creators. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, creative ideas, genres and concepts are developed by a single creator whose ideas are consequently drawn upon by various other creators throughout the industry. This can result in global trends. However, as the wider industry draws on these ideas and trends become established, new ideas must be invented for creative businesses to once again have a competitive edge (Santagata, 2005).

Secondly, it is significant in terms of its effect on policy making. Countries look to each other for economic success and failure stories and often create and adapt policy based on these. With an emerging industry sector such as the creative industries, this is especially important as the few countries with a well-known and

profitable creative sector can influence the policy making of countries still in the process of establishing their creative industries (Acheson, 2003).

Creative export policies

The implementation of effective policies specific to the creative industries is fundamental for their export success as traditional industry policies do not always account for the unique features of the creative industries as explained previously. The factor least protected is that of intellectual property rights. Governments need to guarantee that these rights have global protection to ensure that creative businesses can cultivate points of differentiation (Wyszomirski, 2004).

Policy creation around creative exports can serve three national export goals. Firstly, policy creation can improve a country's international trade and global competitive position by working to increase cultural exports. Secondly, it can help cultivate the creative sector by encouraging cultural identification in a globalised world. Finally, it can encourage the growth of creative organisations through developing their export potential and providing access to export information and distribution channels (Wyszomirski, 2004).

The designer fashion industry

Designer fashion is recognised as a creative industry in most definitions of the creative sector. This is because it is an industry in which the products rely on intellectual property (the creative ideas of people), namely the fashion designers themselves. While this creativity is one aspect of the industry, designer fashion is also a money-making industry, both for the organisation and the wider economy.

Like most creative industries, designer fashion contributes to the value of society in three ways: economically, culturally, and socially.

Fashion and economic value

Worldwide, the designer fashion industry is worth \$45 billion (Hodge, 2008). The way the industry works is through an elite few designers conceptualising trends for the rest of the fashion industry to mass produce. The biannual collections produced by elite fashion designers define seasonal trends, which have a trickle-down effect in the industry. Trends are set by high-end fashion designers on the catwalk (haute couture) which is adapted for their ready-to-wear and diffusion brands. Design-led chain stores such as Top Shop and Diesel then use these trends as a base for their own designs, which then are filtered down to middle-market chain stores such as Marks & Spencer and Myer and finally to low-end stores such as Glassons and Max (French, Crewe, Leyshon, Webb & Thrift, 2004; Rantisi, 2004).

With the rise of globalisation, fashion trends are distributed around the world at a fast pace. The rapid evolution of technology has allowed low-end stores to adopt a fast-fashion model that has proved very successful in terms of sales. Low-end fashion stores view catwalk designs via the internet only moments after they have been presented. They then have their designers replicate these trends and send the designs to third-world countries to be manufactured and have them returned and in stores within weeks of them being on the catwalk (Masson, Iosif, MacKerron & Fernie, 2007). Due to this, it is essential for a high-end fashion designer to have a short design/production/distribution cycle if they want to maintain distinctiveness in their designs.

Fashion and cultural value

The cultural value of designer fashion can be seen in the way that it influences how society perceives clothing and accessories. Initially, clothing was conceived and perceived as a functional item. It was worn for warmth and modesty. As society evolved, fashion became a way for individuals and social groups to express particular values. Fashions often fluctuated with the economic status of Western countries, the common saying in the fashion industry being that hemlines are always longer during times of recession (Easey, 1995). Interestingly, as we enter a global recession, the global trend for hemlines is following this model. This is seen in how hemlines have generally become longer in many designers' 2009 collections.

Twice a year, fashion designers produce a new set of trends and styles that people, especially the fashion conscious, buy. This is significant because society has been conditioned to think that they need new fashion products (clothes, bags, shoes etc.) every season, even though the items they were wearing last year have not worn-out. Fashion items have become a way for members of society to express their individual identities as well as their social and economic status. Designer fashion is the tool that sets the styles and trends to which people conform in order to express this image (Manlow, 2007; Santagata, 2005). Fashion has a tendency to change as cultures evolve and new trends emerge. This continuous evolution of meaning creates a cyclical effect in the fashion economy whereby the more often and drastically styles and trends change, the more fashion products consumers buy and the more money is invested into the economy (Santagata, 2005).

Fashion and social value

The social value of fashion is linked to the way that it helps members of society to identify with their social groups or communicate their place within society (Santagata, 2005). It functions as a “communicative short-hand” (Ferne, Moore, Lawrie & Hallsworth, 1997, p. 152) by immediately communicating the group membership, values and aspirations of the wearer. As such, fashion has the tendency to cultivate stereotypes and allow people to make superficial judgements based on a person’s image (Auty & Elliot, 1998).

The buying of fashion goods (shopping) is perceived by many, especially women, as a recreational pastime that is often to be undertaken with friends. Currently, in Western society a day of shopping often includes activities or participation in multiple other cultural and creative industries, for example lunching at a café, listening to a busker, watching a street performance or visiting an art gallery.

Fashion and business strategy

The majority of designer fashion organisations do not survive longer than three years due to financial difficulties (Malem, 2008). To provide information on the survival strategies of successful fashion designers, Malem (2008) conducted a study of small to medium designer fashion businesses in London. She concluded that there are ten steps that a fashion business needs to follow to successfully operate in the long-term. Of the organisations she studied, half survived longer than five years and had implemented all ten strategies. The other half had all folded in less than five years, owing to only implementing between one and five of the strategies.

The first strategy is to understand the business and industry. It is vital for a designer to understand how a business is run, both the financial and strategic elements of the business as well as the creative side. The business also needs to have a clear vision and produce products that are both innovative yet still wearable.

The second strategy is to manage a slow and sustained growth. Organic growth is key to the success of a fashion business. Organic growth can be defined as sustainable company growth through incremental advancements in production and sales volume. Advancements are considered sustainable when the company does not produce more than it can sell or promise retailers more than it can produce (Dalton & Dalton, 2006). Thus, a designer must be able to ascertain that they have adequate production capacity before selling to retailers and international markets. To maintain growth, designers also need to understand their market and ensure that they are consistent in design, manufacturing and distribution in order to build a loyal retail and consumer base.

Seeking consultancy from other brands and diversifying the product range is the third strategy. Consultancy refers to a designer designing a fashion line for another brand or business, such as New Zealand designers Liz Mitchell designing a clothing range for Farmers and Zambesi designing the uniforms for Air New Zealand. Consultancy is financially beneficial for a designer and also promotes brand awareness, although it is essential for the designer to ensure a good fit of brand values and image with the other brand/business to avoid weakening their own brand image. Diversifying the product range is another strategy to increase income. Designers often add products such as handbags, eyewear or accessories to

their label. It is vital that these new products align with the core identity and values of the brand so they serve to strengthen the brand image (Manlow, 2007).

The fourth strategy is to work to a budget and consolidate contractual agreements. Understanding the cash flow of a fashion business is vital for a designer. In fashion, the designer needs to spend money to design and manufacture a collection before they receive money from retailers. To ensure that their costs will be covered, designers must enter into favourable contractual agreements with manufacturers, agents and retailers. This will guarantee that the designer receives, and thus is able to distribute, their products on time and ensure that they are paid by the retailers. The designer needs to understand this process and how the system works so they can negotiate the best deals for themselves, whether is it payment up front (complete or a deposit) from retailers, 60 day instead of 30 day invoices from manufacturers, or 10% instead of 15% commission for an agent.

Opening a retail store is the fifth strategy that designers should employ. Having an own-brand retail store gives a designer a steady cash flow as opposed to only wholesaling where the designer is only paid twice yearly, once for the autumn/winter collection, and once for the spring/summer collection. The designer also receives the money for the retail mark-up as well as the wholesale mark-up, effectively earning more from these garments than those that are wholesaled. An own-brand store also allows the designer to have control over how the product is being displayed, and to create a store environment that is aligned with the identity of the brand. The changing displays in the store window act as an extension of the catwalk; as another way to communicate the identity

and creativity of the brand as well as promote it to passers-by (Fernie et al., 1997; Guedes & da Costa Soares, 2005).

Controlling every aspect of the business is an important strategy for designers. A designer needs to make sure that they understand and have a say in all parts of the business. They are the driving creative force; however, they also need to control the financial elements of their business to ensure that they are negotiating fair deals and have a steady cash flow. They also need to communicate with their PR firms and consultancy brands to ensure that they are being promoted in alignment with their brand values and identity.

The seventh strategy is to build strong relationships with manufacturers. This is vital, as it is the manufacturers who determine the quality and speed of the garments produced. Small fashion businesses who can only order in small quantities need to build strong relationships with good manufacturers to ensure that they are not relegated to the bottom of the list when larger, more profitable, orders are received from bigger fashion design businesses. Quality manufacturing is also important, with designers needing to negotiate high quality fabric and garment construction in order to effectively compete in the high-end fashion industry.

Designers also need to communicate effectively with chosen markets. This encompasses identifying the consumer market and communicating the fashion brand's unique identity and values through various communication strategies such as fashion shows, advertising and editorials. This is discussed in more depth later.

The ninth strategy is to use role models. Identifying role models in the industry can be useful in helping an emerging fashion business set an achievable vision and business goals. These role models can also be approached for business advice that is especially useful when learning about contractual negotiations and exporting.

Malem's (2008) final strategy is to have an international dimension. International orders are vital for the continued growth and financial stability of a fashion business. Local markets are heavily contested and quickly saturated so fashion businesses need to export to carefully chosen markets to grow (Moore, Fernie & Burt, 2000).

Exporting designer fashion

The main reason that drives fashion designers to export is limited opportunities in their domestic market due to market saturation, limiting regulations or unfavourable trading conditions such as an economic downturn or restrictive government policies. Other business reasons are for increased brand recognition and wealth generation (Moore et al., 2000).

Market entry strategies for fashion firms typically take three forms: wholesaling, own-brand stores and internet retailing. Fashion designers often start exporting by wholesaling their products. This involves stocking their range in established international retail stores. Wholesaling is effective in getting the brand to the right type of consumer without the financial output of opening an own-brand store.

This is because wholesaling allows the designer to stock the brand next to established brands with a similar status in the market. Endorsement through a respected retail store gives the brand credibility in a new market and reduces the

need for advertising or other promotion (Moore et al., 2000). Wholesaling is also low-risk as there is minimal financial investment and resources required (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994; Moore et al., 2000).

The second strategy is to set up an own-brand store in an international capital city. An own-brand store can be vital to the development of a fashion brand's reputation as it acts as a visual communicator of brand values. The street and city the store is in, the atmosphere of the store and the surrounding stores act as an indicator of the status and success of the brand. Own-brand stores are rarely about profit as the overheads are high and turnover is low. Rather, they are focussed on image-building (Moore et al., 2000).

Own-brand stores are high-risk because they require a large capital investment as well as a greater range of resources, including more stock and active promotion. They are also dependent on how well the fashion designer's label is recognised and valued in the market. If it is unrecognised or not a great deal of value or status is placed on the brand, it is unlikely that the retail store will be successful (Ferne et al., 1997).

The development of an internet retail site is the third entry strategy. The internet is worldwide and, provided that the company provides shipping to different countries, can be a useful and low-risk tool for retailing the product at a minimal financial cost to the designer. It also has the advantages of being able to serve both the domestic and foreign markets simultaneously, minimising the need to deal with international agents or distributors, and not requiring many resources (Bennett, 1997).

Preparing for export

Regardless of the market entry strategy preferred by fashion designers, exporting designer fashion requires extensive preparation and research. In comparison to traditional exports such as dairy or wool, designer fashion is sensitive to the business and cultural environment of each market. As such, the accurate appraisal and selection of markets is vital to success (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994).

Initially, markets are often chosen because of their geographical proximity and cultural similarity to the domestic market. This is because it is preferable for a designer to gain experience in international markets that, due to the similarities of target publics, has a lesser chance of failure (Moore et al., 2000).

Bohdanowicz and Clamp (1994) have identified an extensive list of factors that need to be researched before export. The most important of these include the economic and societal environment of the country of export. The country that is to be exported to needs to have a strong economy. The economic well-being of a society and, in particular, inflation and the availability of consumer credit, has a large effect on the luxury goods industry. If a country is in recession, consumers will view designer clothing as an extravagance and luxury that they are unlikely to purchase.

The standard of living must also be researched. Designer fashion has a niche market that is generally found in the wealthier middle to high classes of society who have a desire for and can afford luxury goods. As such, the standard of living needs to be high as this reflects the level of consumerism of the society. Business regulations are another important factor to research; some countries and governments have business regulations that heavily impact designer fashion

exports, for example, tax restrictions, sizing guides and trade tariffs (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994).

Fashion and sustainability

Global societal issues can also have an effect on the fashion industry. A factor that has only recently begun to have an impact on fashion exports is sustainability.

Consumers are being encouraged to purchase goods produced in their own country; in New Zealand there is a big push for this with the recent launch of the “Buy New Zealand Made” government campaign. The purpose is to reduce the carbon footprint associated with goods and to retain manufacturing jobs in New Zealand. Clothing in particular has an extensive carbon trail. Goods are typically designed in one country, materials for fabric are sourced in another country, fabric is designed and made in another, the garment is constructed in a different country, and then it is retailed in the original country and possibly others if the fashion company exports (Masson et al., 2007).

As the sustainability trend continues and develops, it will effect an organisation’s decision to source and manufacture overseas. Locally made products will be demanded by consumers who want ethical and sustainable goods. The restrictions that governments are likely to put in place will make local production of goods more economically viable for organisations. This could see a trend for designer fashion companies to source locally made fabrics and materials as well as manufacture goods onshore.

Fashion PR

Fashion PR is only a recent area of specialisation in the PR industry. Fashion PR has three main functions; media relations and publicity materials, corporate communications and fashion events. Media relations is a vital aspect of fashion PR as the media is the main communication channel with target publics. The publicity materials organised for the media include press releases, lookbooks, showrooms, the organisation of personal interviews and press launches. Media coverage is important to the image of fashion designers as it is not paid for and, therefore, is seen by the fashion designer's publics and stakeholders as being more credible than advertising (Kay, 1995).

Unfortunately, fashion organisations cannot completely control the type of publicity their fashion products are going to receive because it is difficult to predict how critics, for example, journalists and magazine editors, are likely to use or evaluate them (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). This is due to both personal taste and because fashion critics face a dilemma between the need to give the reader useful fashion advice and information as well as the desire to report on fascinating, yet extreme, trends (Maramotti, 2005).

The organisation of fashion events is a unique aspect of PR in the fashion industry. Fashion shows have become more than just promotional events; they are artistic creations in their own right. They are a useful tool for communicating the identity of the fashion designer as well as building recognition within their target publics. Other valuable fashion events include in-store exhibitions, trade exhibitions and charity events (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994).

The corporate communication function of fashion PR is regarded primarily as the creation and maintenance of a strong corporate and brand identity, image and reputation. This will be discussed in more depth in the next section. This function also covers the building of relationships with key stakeholders, including the media, financial investors, industry professionals and target publics (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994).

Identity, image and branding

Corporate identity

Corporate identity is the way an organisation presents itself to its publics through communication, behaviour and symbols (Van Riel, 1995). Ideally, corporate identity presents that which is distinctive, enduring and valued within an organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Hatch and Schultz (2000) describe two types of corporate identity. The first is the organisation's visual identity, which consists of elements such as the company's logo, trademarks and buildings. Recently the elements of sound, smell and touch have been added. For a designer fashion organisation, the element of touch is important to the organisation's identity as designer fashion products are tangible products constructed with materials that are deemed to be of high quality because of the way that they feel. In relation to visual identity, Saviolo (2002) states that the focal point of a designer's brand is its stylistic identity. This is the consistent style that is apparent throughout the designer's collections. Stylistic identity and visual identity need to be consistent in order to create strong and aligned brand and corporate identities.

The second type of corporate identity is strategic identity. Strategic identity is based on aligning the central idea of the organisation, its vision, mission and philosophy with the image and reputation of the organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 2000). Effectively communicating the strategic identity of the organisation is essential for a designer fashion brand as it is this identity that consumers identify with and consequently leads them to buy the products every season.

Fluid identity

An enduring identity is seen to be beneficial to an organisation as constituents can relate to and identify with the organisation over a long period of time. This builds a sense of loyalty, protecting the organisation during crisis, development and change (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Scott & Lane, 2000). This is especially important in the fashion industry as the product changes rapidly. While an enduring identity is important, recent scholarly literature has identified that a fluid identity can be even more beneficial to an organisation, especially one in a fast paced industry such as fashion design (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2005; Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2004; Manlow, 2007).

A fluid identity is one that changes in response to its operating environment.

While the core values and beliefs of the organisation's identity must remain the same to still project a sense of continuity, the interpretations and meanings of the identity can change. The benefits of a fluid identity are that an organisation can quickly respond to the dynamic nature of the market and can incorporate the new innovations and technologies that are being produced with increasing speed. The challenge identified by scholars today is for an organisation to create and maintain

a unique identity that is both enduring and fluid (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2005; Gioia et al., 2004).

The nature of the fashion industry is such that fashion organisations need to be constantly responsive to their environment yet still project continuity. Without a unique and enduring identity, fashion brands will lose loyal consumers and retailers and be reported on negatively by the media. However, if they do not respond to their environment and follow current trends, they will be perceived as uninventive and ignorant and will also lose retailers and consumers and garner negative media coverage.

Manlow (2007) describes the characteristic of fashion organisations responding to their environment as isomorphism of structure and practice, where a new idea or design developed by one fashion brand is quickly adopted by many other fashion brands. This is how certain styles become trends. Because of the need for a fashion brand to be unique yet still follow the trends, fashion brands tend to interpret a trend in a way that both “supports the established image of the brand and meets the expectations of the consumer base” (Manlow, 2007, p. 125). It is this constant response to the environment that allows the fashion industry to change and evolve and the organisations within it to remain able to operate.

Branding

Brands in the creative industries are mainly used to express intangible benefits and attributes about the product. To be effective, a symbol intensive brand such as designer fashion needs to awaken desires and provide pleasure for the consumer (Saviolo, 2002). Moore (1995) defines this concept as lifestyle branding. Lifestyle

branding is where the values, associations and promises suggested by a brand reflect the lifestyle that the target consumer aspires to. It is thought that famous fashion designer Coco Chanel was the first to use this concept to sell designer fashion. Fernie et al. (1997) describe how:

Chanel recognized two important dimensions of branding that have now become the corner-stone of luxury goods branding. The first was the ability of the fashion brand to become synonymous with a particular lifestyle, while the second was that not everyone who aspired to a particular lifestyle fashion brand could afford it. (p. 152)

In relation to this, Florida (2005) suggests that the symbolism of brands is often linked to experience and that fashion designers try to link their brand with a particular experience and, by doing so, the consumer can buy the experience by buying the brand.

According to Olins (cited in Argenti & Forman, 2002), brands have become highly effective in modern society for three reasons. Firstly, due to the increased competition between products in the market, brands are the main way consumers differentiate one product from a similar one. Secondly, brands “provide the comfort of consistency in today’s quick-paced society” (p.79). With the rapid change of technology and the constantly increasing availability of new products, consumers tend to identify themselves with one brand and remain loyal in an effort to reduce uncertainty about product identity and quality. Thirdly, brands create empathy with the consumer. Brands cultivate personalities that allow consumers to relate to them and place their trust in them.

Brand personality

Brand personality is the set of human characteristics that are associated with a brand to enable consumers to identify themselves within a brand and choose to use certain brands to express their own personality. Consumers use possessions to portray their actual or desired self so the closer the brand personality is to the desired self, the more likely a person is to buy the branded product (Matthiesen & Phau, 2005).

Brands that carry the name of the creator usually communicate the same personality traits as the creator. This is because the nature of original creation is that in which the creator expresses their personality through the products they create (Kapferer, 2008). Designer fashion brands are usually named after the designer and thus can be argued to portray the same personality characteristics as the designer.

Branding and celebrities

Celebrity endorsement can be used by organisations to add value and status to a brand. This can enhance the image of the brand or attribute new characteristics to the brand through meaning transfer. This is where, in the consumers mind, the characteristics of the celebrity are transferred to the brand, altering the way they perceive the brand (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). Celebrity endorsement only enhances the fashion brand's image if the celebrity wearing the label is a good fit.

To be a good fit, the celebrity must be regarded as having expertise or credibility in that area. For a fashion label, this means that they are perceived by the consumer as a fashion icon, someone who knows what is fashionable or not

(Becker-Olson & Hill, 2006). The individual characteristics of the celebrity, such as age, occupation, personality and lifestyle, also affect the brand image. If the celebrity is sexy, successful and high-fashion, these characteristics will be attributed to the fashion label, likewise if the celebrity is trashy, unfashionable or unsuccessful (Gwinner, 1997).

Branding and sponsors

Sponsorship is a strategic way for a brand to enhance its image, promote brand awareness and/or strengthen relationships with stakeholders. Typically, sponsorship takes the form of financial support from an external organisation although product and service sponsorship are becoming more common (Dolphin, 2003). As well as these benefits, the receiving organisation may also gain credibility and legitimacy. In return, the external organisation gains brand awareness and goodwill. It is important for both parties to clearly define what they want to get out of the sponsorship arrangement and ensure that this is delivered upon (Dolphin, 2003; Hoek, 1999).

Sponsorship also leads to a meaning transfer of values and characteristics between both parties involved (Dolphin, 2003; Gwinner, 1997). For example, a fashion brand sponsors a charity in the hope that the goodwill that charity does will be transferred to their brand in the minds of their target consumer. Likewise, the charity hopes that the status value of the fashion designer will be transferred to their product, enticing consumers to buy it. This transfer will only be successful if the organisations are a good fit, with similar organisational values. If not, the public will experience inconsistency, leading them to question each party's motives in the sponsorship agreement. Thus, it is important for both parties to

make sure that the values and characteristics of the other organisation are aligned with its own or are those which they want to develop (Becker-Olson & Hill, 2006).

The relationship between corporate identity and branding

The identity of a brand is underpinned by the identity of the organisation. The brand is essentially the “face” of the organisation and the way that the public perceives it, whereas the focus of the corporate identity is more internal (Balmer, 2005). In an organisation that only has one brand of which it shares the same name, the corporate and brand identities tend to be the same (Kapferer, 2008). This tends to be the case in designer fashion organisations and, as such, the term brand identity will now be used to refer to both.

In the designer fashion industry, a strong brand identity is an essential element for organisational and commercial success. As the fashion product changes seasonally, it is the enduring nature of the brand that stabilises the relationship between the organisation and its consumers (Saviolo, 2002). A strong brand identity is also essential for a fashion designer to differentiate themselves within a saturated marketplace and is considered by scholars as a significant, if not the most important, business asset (Bridson & Evans, 2004; Moore, 1995). A designer fashion brand can only compete in a saturated market if they have a clearly identifiable and unique identity, and it is this that enables the brand to command premium prices and attract financial investment (Bridson & Evans, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 2000).

After the creation of a unique brand identity, an organisation needs to maintain it. This is because the brand's history can be one of its most valuable assets. A consistent and enduring brand identity can give a brand authenticity and recognition in the fast-changing fashion industry (Saviolo, 2002).

Corporate image

As well as a strong brand identity, an organisation needs to portray a positive image. In the high-end designer fashion industry, consumers buy fashion products based on the image of the fashion label (Bridson & Evans, 2004; Moore, 1995; Saviolo, 2002), highlighting the need for the creation and maintenance of a strong corporate image. A well-communicated image serves to establish a brand's position within the market and protect it from competition, thereby enhancing the brand's performance (Park, Jaworski & MacInnis, 1986).

There are two schools of thought about what comprises corporate image. Firstly, corporate image can be defined as the "feelings and beliefs about the company that exist in the minds of its audiences" (Berstein as cited in Hatch & Schultz, 1997, p. 359). As such, corporate image is how an organisation's publics see it and could differ from the organisation's identity and how it wants to be perceived (Argenti, 2003; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Gioia et al., 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 1997).

Secondly, corporate image can be defined as "a construction of public impressions created to appeal to an audience" (Hatch and Schultz, 1997, p. 359). This school of thought holds the view that an organisation projects a desired image to their publics. This image may be different, but should be based on their corporate identity (Balmer, 2001; Gioia et al., 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). In the fashion

industry, the projection of a desired image is seen in how the organisation creates a brand identity based on an aspired lifestyle. This is not the actual identity of the organisation but is used as a tool to attract media, consumers and sponsors.

The organisation's identity and image contribute to the reputation of the organisation. When an organisation's identity and image are aligned, an organisation is said to have a good reputation (Argenti & Forman, 2002). A good reputation is important for any organisation, but especially crucial for an organisation in which the value of the products is directly linked to the value of the company's identity and image.

Argenti and Forman (2002) discuss how organisations can face backlash if they do not live up to the expectations of their stakeholders. They believe that brands are only real in the imaginations of stakeholders and, "in this imaginary world, even the smallest shortcomings or misalignments are seen as premeditated and an attempt to dupe the consumer" (p. 88). In regards to designer fashion, it only takes one collection that disappoints the media and consumers to be harmful to the organisation's reputation. Fashion designers thus need to effectively communicate a coherent and consistent identity through each of their collections and to build a good reputation among stakeholders so they are more likely to forgive them after unsuccessful collections.

International communication strategies

There are two prevalent schools of thought in marketing and PR literature about the type of communication and branding strategy a business should use when exporting. The first is the use of a standardised branding and communication

strategy; the second is adapting the branding and communication strategies to each market. However, Vrontis and Vronti (2004) argue that when a fashion brand decides to export, the best strategy is to use a combination of standardisation and adaptation.

With a standardised strategy, organisations make decisions from a domestic perspective and use the same marketing and PR campaigns in all international markets. The benefit of this is that it is relatively low-cost as research and design does not need to be repeated in different countries. The issues associated with this perspective are that the advertising messages may not be received well in all markets and thus the brand will be perceived to have a lower, or different from intended, value (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994; Vrontis & Vronti, 2004).

When using an adaptive strategy, organisations take the view that every country has a vastly different culture and thus each marketing and PR campaign needs to be specifically tailored to each local environment. The benefit of this is that each market has a message that should be highly effective and enhance the value of the brand. The problem with this strategy is that it is costly because individual programmes require extensive market research and mean that there are relatively few, if any, economies of scale (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994; Vrontis & Vronti, 2004).

A combination of both perspectives perceives markets as having similarities and differences. This means that the organisation can localise some aspects of the marketing and PR messages and standardise others. This has the advantage of being cost effective, as it does not create a new campaign for every market, while

still tailoring the messages to fit the different markets (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994; Vrontis & Vronti, 2004).

A planned strategy

Scholarly literature is unified in the assertion that an organisation needs to have a planned international communication and branding strategy (Cateora & Graham, 2005; Jeannet & Hennessey, 2004; Moore et al., 2000). A strategic approach to international marketing and PR ensures that a shared understanding of the brand identity and image is developed across all markets. Positioning the brand consistently is vital to maintaining the status of the brand. For example, if a designer fashion brand is elite, it needs to ensure that only a limited amount of stock is retailed in all markets rather than a limited amount in one market and a mass amount in another, as doing so can weaken the status and desirability of the brand. Positioning can be controlled through strategic merchandising, distributing and pricing (Moore, et al., 2000).

Merchandising involves the retailing of the product, including its position in store, how it is displayed and the store image. The management of this is crucial if the fashion designer's garments are being stocked in a store other than an own-brand store as the retail store and the display of the products contributes to the image of the fashion designer's brand (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994, Moore & Fairhurst, 2003).

Pricing is dependent on the economic environment of the foreign market. The pricing of products needs to be in line with the status of the product in comparison to similar products in the market and with what the target consumers are able to

pay (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994). It is desirable for an organisation to keep as much control as possible over the pricing of products in order to align it with the organisation's marketing and PR objectives, whether it is to enhance brand image, return on profit or to gain a targeted market share (Cateora & Graham, 2005).

Country-of-origin effect

The country-of-origin effect (COO) is an external organisational factor that can have a significant impact on the way a market perceives a product, and thus the communication strategies of the organisation. COO can be defined as “any influence that the country of manufacture, assembly, or design has on a consumer's positive or negative perception of a product” (Cateora & Graham, 2005, p.367). The COO of a product influences consumer's perceptions of the product in two ways: quality and purchase value. In regards to quality, consumers typically have positive and negative stereotypes about certain countries and associate these with particular products. For example, common positive product perceptions include French perfume, Jamaican rum or Italian leather. Common negative product perceptions include Chinese apparel, Korean electronics and British beef. In relation to purchase value, products which are considered to be of a higher quality due to their COO generally can command a higher purchase price because they are associated with a greater value, both monetary and brand-wise (Lim & O'Cass, 2001).

An organisation needs to factor COO into their international communication strategy. If the COO has positive connotations in regards to the organisation's product, it can be beneficial for the organisation to actively promote its country of origin. On the other hand, if the COO has negative connotations for the product,

the organisation needs to find ways to counter this by focussing on other attractive features of the product, such as quality or price (Cateora & Graham, 2005).

Designer fashion products are heavily influenced by COO in two ways. First is the country of manufacture. Garments that are manufactured in developing countries are considered inferior to those manufactured in developed countries and, in particular, the country in which the fashion designer is based. Second is the fashion designer's country of origin. Fashion designers from France and Italy are considered the epitome of fashion designers and some markets consider products from these countries to have a much higher brand value. American and British fashion industries have had to work hard over the past 70 years to be recognised alongside French and Italian designers as leading players in the fashion design industry. Designers from Australasia are beginning to gain a positive reputation in the international fashion scene; however, they are still far from being considered industry leaders and trend-setters (Mulvagh, 2003).

Concluding remarks

This chapter connected scholarly literature on the creative industries, designer fashion industry and public relations to provide a comprehensive and contextual view of this research study. The next chapter draws from this to present the research questions for this thesis. It goes on to explain how the case study method is used within an interpretive framework to answer these questions.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

This chapter first presents the research questions for this study, drawing on literature presented in the previous chapter to explain them in context. It goes on to discuss the interpretive methodology that this research is based on, with a focus on conducting organisational research from an interpretive perspective. The chapter then examines how the qualitative interview method and other data collection methods are appropriate for this study. Following from this, collective case studies are explained as the most effective method of in-depth analysis for the data. Finally, this chapter concludes with an outline of the difficulties and limitations faced in this research.

Research questions

The literature demonstrates that the construction and maintenance of a unique identity is crucial in the field of fashion design. In an industry in which the product is constantly changing, the need for a fluid yet continuous identity is also critical to satisfy and maintain loyal publics and stakeholders. For this reason, the following questions will be investigated:

1. How do fashion designers in New Zealand construct and communicate a unique corporate identity?
2. How do they maintain a fluid and continuous corporate identity with a constantly changing product?

The first two questions contain the assumption that fashion designers *do* construct and communicate a unique, fluid and continuous identity. This assumption has been made from the literature, which states that organisations who operate in contexts such as that of fashion designers should strive to create identities that are unique, fluid and continuous (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2005; Gioia et al., 2004; Manlow, 2007).

The literature on identity (see, for example, Csaba & Bengtsson, 2005; Gioia et al., 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Scott & Lane, 2000) has many definitions and labels of the terms in the second question and so the language used needs to be explained. *Continuous* has been used instead of the terms stable or enduring. Stable and enduring imply that the organisation's identity is permanent and fixed. In contrast, continuous implies that an organisation's identity can change and evolve in response to the environment while still retaining its core defining characteristics. *Constantly changing product* is in reference to the short product life-cycle of fashion. The fashion product changes bi-annually and thus a fashion designer needs to construct and project a different brand image to their publics twice yearly. As discussed in the literature (Argenti, 2003; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Gioia et al., 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 1997), image can have an effect on identity and thus a fashion designer's brand identity may be under threat of reconstruction twice yearly. This question aims to discover if this is the case and investigate how fashion designers deal with this.

The first research question covers a wide scope and lends itself to two interpretations, both of which will be researched as the following sub-questions:

1.1 How do fashion designers in New Zealand differentiate themselves within the field of fashion design?

1.2 How do New Zealand fashion designers draw on the New Zealand identity to construct and communicate a unique identity to international markets?

The first sub-question investigates how fashion designers differentiate and create a unique identity. *New Zealand* has been added as the scope of the research is limited to New Zealand fashion designers. It is hoped however, that the conclusions drawn from research into this question could be transferred to other contexts in international markets and to other creative industries in New Zealand.

The second sub-question investigates if and how fashion designers draw on the New Zealand national identity to help construct and communicate a unique identity within international markets. New Zealand has a distinctive national identity and is best known for its clean, green image. New Zealanders are perceived as innovative, imaginative and creative. It will be interesting to discover if, in a global market, fashion designers actively construct an identity from which they can be recognised specifically as a New Zealand fashion designer and how this identity contributes to their international success.

An interpretive perspective

This research study will be conducted within an interpretive framework. Research from an interpretive perspective is based on the construction of meaning and seeks to create understanding of the world in which we live (Creswell, 2007; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Schwandt, 2000; Swanson, 2005). It takes the view that people and organisations actively create and shape their own environments through

interactions with others and with the environment (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Putnam, 1983).

One of the key concepts of the interpretive approach is the study of how an organisation constructs and communicates meaning (Bryman, 2001; Maxwell, 2005; Putnam, 1983; Schwandt, 2000; Trujillo & Toth, 1987). When used to conduct organisational research, the interpretive perspective takes the view that the reality of the organisation's environment is constructed through the interactions between the organisation's words, actions and symbols, and its publics (Arneson, 2005). It places a focus on analysing organisational symbols such as brands, documents and values, and the process through which organisations communicate these to their publics (Trujillo & Toth, 1987). In regards to this research study, identity is a construction and communication of meaning, hence the reason why an interpretive approach has been chosen.

Organisational research from an interpretive perspective includes an emphasis on the meanings of organisational behaviour and symbols, as well as how they are created and altered by the interactions between the organisation and its publics and stakeholders (Arneson, 2005; Putnam, 1983). This is an important perspective for this research study to take as it examines the behaviours and symbols designer fashion organisations use in the creation of a unique domestic and export identity. It also investigates how external stakeholders contribute to the success of these organisations in domestic and export markets.

Within an interpretive framework, organisations create relationships with their members and publics through processes that eventually become accepted practices. These practices are not fixed, but are altered through the ongoing

activities and behaviours of the organisation and its interactions with its environment and publics (Putnam, 1983). Arneson (2005) adds that from an interpretive perspective, publics and organisations engage in “continual cycles of creation, interpretation, and re-creation of meaning” (p. 160). As such, the way that organisations and their publics act and react to each other is heavily dependent on the context of the situation and the meanings each derive from it. This theory fits well in regards to this thesis as it is studying the ongoing cyclical communicative behaviours of designer fashion organisations with their publics and markets in the construction of a unique and fluid identity and image.

Research from an interpretive perspective is context-bound as it is based on meaning derived from the actions and experiences of participants in certain situations. This meaning is only accurate and relevant to that particular situation and can only be understood in terms of the greater system of meanings, or context, that it belongs to (Bryman, 2001; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). Even so, interpretive researchers search for patterns of meaning which they can then use to generalise and create understanding about how realities are produced (Schwandt, 2000; Swanson, 2005). As such, this research is relevant only in relation to the current environment of New Zealand fashion designers and the designer fashion industry; however, certain generalisations could be useful in understanding the New Zealand creative industries as a whole.

Using an interpretive approach allows the researcher to disregard the need for a research hypothesis. The predetermined causes in a hypothesis can lead the researcher to subconsciously design interview questions and/or interpret data to fit with these causes. In contrast, beginning with research questions that are not

based on a hypothesis encourages the researcher to investigate a diverse range of causes and then focus on those that are most significant to the study. Research is thus guided by the emerging themes and experiences of the situations and participants as opposed to being predetermined by a theory (Lin, 1998). As such, conclusions can be considered more accurate and credible, with the understanding that they are context-bound (Bryman, 2001; Lin, 1998).

Interpretive research respects the knowledge of the participants and recognises that it is only through their knowledge that meaning and understanding can be found. As such, research data is highly descriptive and rich as meaning is derived from the details of the situation as given by the participant (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). To add credibility and validity to the research, data is typically gathered from a wide range of sources including, but not limited to, interviews, participant observations, organisational documents and organisational symbols (Bryman, 2001; Putnam, 1983). With its need for rich data, interpretive research lends itself to the method of in-depth interviews.

The qualitative interview method

As a method, interviews lend themselves well for data gathering within an interpretive perspective. Warren (2002) discusses how, from an interpretive view, interview participants are more likely to be “viewed as meaning makers, not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers” (p. 83). Interview participants work with the interviewee to create meaning and understanding of a situation.

The goals of the qualitative interview are twofold. Firstly, the researcher aims to view the issue being researched from the perspective of the interview participant and understand why they have this perspective (King, 1994). Secondly, the goal is for the interviewer to gain an understanding of the meanings of the interviewee's experiences and draw interpretations from the data. As such, the interview is framed as a guided conversation, where the researcher carefully listens in such a way as to hear the meaning of what is being expressed (Warren, 2002).

Gubrium and Holstein (2001) discuss the concept of the modern temper. The modern temper draws on the concept of the qualitative interview as it conceptualises the idea of each individual as "significant commentators of their own experience" (p. 5). This means that individuals have the power and the right to speak freely and have their opinions heard and regarded as important. In relation to this study, it means that each designer interviewed can be regarded as giving significant data to the research, regardless of whether they are considered an expert in the field.

There are three types of qualitative interviews: fully structured, semi-structured and unstructured. The fully structured interview only includes predetermined, fixed worded questions that are asked in a set order. Semi-structured interviews also have predetermined questions, but the order can be changed and they can be modified, discarded and/or added to as the interview progresses. The questions can also be explained and prompts and probes can be used to clarify answers or to seek further information. Unstructured interviews do not use predetermined questions. Instead, the researcher conducts a conversation with the participant around a general area of interest (Bryman, 2004; King, 1994; Robson, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews

The type of interview chosen for this research study is semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews have been chosen because they allow for rich data gathering due to the ability of the researcher to ask clarifying and follow-up questions. This allows the researcher to be certain that they understand the answer and its intended meaning completely before moving on to the next question. Semi-structured interviews also allow for the interview participant to clarify questions and offer experiences that digress from the questions but may be relevant (Bryman, 2004; Robson, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews comprise four types of questions: main questions, probes, prompts and follow-up questions. Main questions are designed to guide the conversation so the data collected will be useful in answering the research question(s). These questions are typically open-ended to encourage the interview participant to give a lot of information in a way that is only focused by their thought processes. This provides the researcher with a data-rich account of the experiences of the interviewee with as little external influence from the researcher as possible. Probes are used to encourage the interview participant to expand on their answer and/or to clarify answers. Probes could include asking a question such as “what is your opinion on this?” or employing tactics such as silence, an enquiring glance or sounds such as “mmhmm” (Bryman, 2004; Robson, 2002; Warren, 2001).

Prompts can also be used to gain more information. A researcher may go into an interview with a list of expected answers for a question. This can be read out by the researcher or shown to the interview participant as a way to jog their memory

or elicit some sort of response. Follow-up questions are also used to further investigate how answers relate to the main questions and to check for accuracy between statements. These questions are generally composed in the interview as a reaction to the answers given (Robson, 2002; Warren, 2001; Wilson & Goodall, 1991). Also included is a fact sheet that covers generic descriptors such as age, gender, company, brands etc (Warren, 2001).

It is important that the interviewer is flexible and willing to alter the questions, or even disregard planned questions that emerge as irrelevant, as meanings shift and develop through the answers provided (Warren, 2001). This will allow the researcher to probe further into areas of interest that develop which had previously not been thought of. This has the potential to lead to interesting discoveries that may have a significant impact on the findings. Being flexible also gives the researcher the ability to make sure that they understand the meanings within the experiences being shared by the interviewee. Understanding the real meanings is crucial for accuracy of interpretation and analysis of the data. For multiple case study research, while the researcher still needs to remain flexible, they must ensure that the interviews across participants have a similar structure to enable the cases to be compared (Bryman, 2004).

Strengths and limitations

Like any method, the qualitative interview method has particular strengths and limitations. One of the greatest weaknesses of the qualitative interview method is its subjectivity. According to Bryman (2001), the interview is subjected to multiple levels of interpretations. Firstly, question design is based on the interpretations of the researcher about the topic and literature that informs the

research. Secondly, the interviewee is giving their interpretation of an experience, which the researcher then further interprets during data analysis. Finally, the researcher's interpretations are then interpreted further in relation to literature.

Another weakness is researcher bias. The interviewer can unknowingly offer cues as to how they want the respondent to respond. These cues may be in the form of question design, body language and verbal intonations (Bryman, 2001; Johnson, 2002). The interviewer needs to be aware of the factors that can influence interviewees' answers and endeavour to minimise these cues.

The interview method's greatest strength is the ability to gather rich, in-depth data that can be interpreted using a variety of analytical methods (Johnson, 2002). The interview allows for dialogic communication, whereby both the interviewee and the researcher can clarify and expand on points of interest or confusion. A semi-structured interview also gives the researcher the ability to follow the different themes that emerge during the interview (Johnson, 2002). A final strength is that the interviewee often gains further knowledge from the interview and is thus rewarded for their participation (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001).

Data collection

This study comprises four interviews from high-end New Zealand fashion designers. The themes from the interviews are identified and synthesised to draw overall conclusions about how New Zealand fashion designers construct and communicate a unique identity to domestic and export markets, and how they maintain a fluid and continuous identity with a constantly changing product. Conclusions are also drawn about the support New Zealand fashion designers

need to build a successful brand and business within New Zealand and in export markets.

Primary data

The majority of data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with each fashion designer. The interviews were approximately one hour long and were conducted in person at a location of the designer's choice. The interviews were one-off interviews and further information was collected as needed through email.

Three fashion designers were interviewed. These were Cybèle Wiren from *Cybèle*, Jo Robertson from *Jo Robertson Maternity*, and Robyn Brooks from *Ooby Ryn*. For primary data collection on Annah Stretton, her 2007 autobiography is used. This is supplemented with an interview with Tony Hope, General Manager for Annah Stretton Clothing Ltd. All four interviewees consented to their names being used in this thesis.

These four designers were chosen as they met particular criteria. All of the designers labels have websites and are well publicised, ensuring that there was sufficient secondary data to use them as case studies. Cybèle Wiren and Annah Stretton were specifically chosen because they are designers that are well recognised nationally and have gained international success. Jo Robertson and Robyn Brooks were selected because they are emerging designers who are still establishing their brand identity and are also researching initial exporting possibilities.

Secondary data

Secondary data about the fashion designers was collected from the designers' websites, media releases, collections and runway shows. This data is important as it is a strategic, formal representation of the fashion designer's brand identity. It was analysed as part of the case studies to ascertain whether there were elements in this data that were strategically used to communicate a unique and fluid identity.

Data was also collected from magazine articles, newspaper articles and fashion industry websites which, while they are not formal sources of organisational identity, gave additional information about the public's perception of the fashion designer's brand identity and the environment in which the designer is operating.

Analysis of data

The data was analysed through collective case studies. A thematic analysis was used to draw out the dominant themes that addressed the research questions.

Case studies

The goal of case study research is to capture and analyse a phenomenon, or real life event, within its context, using multiple sources of data (evidence) (Hartley, 1994; David, 2006). It is necessary to highlight that the emphasis on describing and placing the phenomenon within its context creates the difference between case study research and many other types of research methods that seek to analyse just the phenomenon (Hartley, 1994). To provide a detailed context of a case, it is necessary that data collection is extensive and from multiple sources. Yin (2003)

suggests the collection of six types of information: interviews, documents, direct observations, participant-observations, archival records and physical artifacts.

Stake (2005) presents three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. Intrinsic case studies are undertaken because the researcher has a particular interest in one case and desires to understand it further. While this research study has elements of an intrinsic case study, as each case is interesting individually, it is primarily an instrumental and collective case study.

An instrumental case study is used to provide insight about an issue and can be used to draw generalisations. In this instance, it is not the case study itself that is of particular interest, but rather the way the information can be used to facilitate understanding about an issue. A collective case study is a number of instrumental case studies that are jointly studied to investigate a widespread issue, phenomenon or population. Each individual case is analysed for themes and then common themes are drawn together and form the basis for generalisation and recommendations (Stake, 2005).

Using multiple case studies to analyse an issue provides richer data than individual case studies because they present different perspectives on the same issue. They also act as contrasts to give the researcher a deeper understanding as to the nature of the phenomenon and the impact of the context in which it occurs (Creswell, 2007; Ellinger, Watkins, & Marsick, 2005). Using multiple case studies allows for replication as the researcher can repeat the procedures of data collection and information sought for each case. This attempt at rigour allows for generalisations to be made about the issues under investigation.

Selecting and bounding the cases

Individual cases are chosen for a collective case study because they have been identified as potentially sharing a common issue and/or have the ability to provide insight into this issue. It is the researcher's prerogative as to whether the cases are similar or dissimilar as it is beneficial to have both overlapping information to confirm phenomenon and a variety of information to extend the context of the issue (Ellinger et al., 2005; Stake 2005). To ensure that the generalisations made from the cases have validity and will stand up to rigour, representative cases need to be chosen. For this study, the cases need to be representative of the different organisations in the New Zealand fashion industry. As such, they have been deliberately chosen to represent a range of fashion organisations in various stages of identity formation and export development while also covering a range of issues that are commonly experienced at these stages.

A case study is characterised by being a bounded system (Stake, 2005). Each case must have boundaries that define the parameters of the case. These boundaries must include, but are not limited to, the issue being investigated, the context, the time period, and whether the data collected is retrospective, ongoing or both (Ellinger et al., 2005). The boundaries of a case need to be set before data collection to focus the research, but the researcher must be aware that the boundaries of an individual case, and around multiple cases, may change as the research is collected.

The boundaries that surround this research are firstly the concepts and issues of identity, image and branding that are being investigated. These provide the framework for the case selections, research questions and data collection. A

second boundary is that the cases take place within the context of the New Zealand fashion industry and, as such, are limited in their generalisability. Care has been taken to choose cases that are representative of fashion organisations at different stages of growth so that more accurate generalisations can be made which will help a greater range of organisations within this industry. Finally, the cases are bounded by the time period of data collection and analysis and by the retrospective nature of the data.

The case study approach has been chosen because the issues being investigated in this thesis can only be understood and have influence in relation to their context (David, 2006). Case studies are a data-rich and meaningful method of presenting data and have the ability to capture fine detail within a specific context (Hartley, 1994). This is ideal for presenting complex data collected from designer fashion organisations in a way that situates and explains it within a unique context. It also allows for a more accurate analysis between cases as the unique context can be identified in individual cases. This allows the researcher to draw more accurate conclusions and produce recommendations for certain situations within the New Zealand creative industry context.

Case study research is also deemed an appropriate method when the researcher is interested in answering questions of how, what and why about an issue or phenomenon (Ellinger et al., 2005). These are evident in the research questions for this study. These types of questions are designed to gather rich, detailed information, which is ideal to draw together in case study format.

Case study analysis

There are multiple ways to analyse case studies involving both qualitative and quantitative methods. For this research, the qualitative method of thematic analysis was used. For this, the themes within and between the cases were identified. They were then analysed with scholarly literature in order to draw generalisations and conclusions about the data.

The purpose of case study data analysis is to “identify, sort through, and pattern relationships, dynamics, or other phenomena of interest within a bounded system” (Ellinger et al., 2005, p. 341). To do so, the researcher needs to conduct a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying significant or recurring themes in the data, and the categorisation of these themes under thematic headings (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young & Sutton, 2005). Thematic analysis is particularly useful when dealing with interview data from a variety of sources as the “themes that emerge from the informants' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience” (Aronson, 1994, p. 2).

The first step to conducting a thematic analysis is to engage in categorical aggregation. This involves analysing the cases individually and identifying a “collection of instances from the data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 163) and placing these into identifiable categories. It is hoped that these categories will highlight meanings relevant to the issues being studied. These categories are then analysed for patterns (similarities and differences) and these patterns are separated into themes. The themes are then interpreted using literature to develop generalisations about the cases relevant to the research study. This can be done when evidence from multiple case studies is provided for each theme. Finally, these

generalisations can be turned into recommendations for, in the case of this research study, other creative industry organisations to apply to their businesses (Creswell, 2007).

As well as categorical aggregation, the researcher can also engage in direct interpretation. This involves looking closely at a significant single instance and drawing meaning from it by pulling apart the data and putting it back together in a more meaningful way (Creswell, 2007). Direct interpretation allows the researcher to gain meaning from instances that perhaps do not fit into a theme, but contain information that is useful to the research. The meaning gained from these interpretations can be used to contribute to the formation of generalisations and recommendations.

Difficulties and limitations

One difficulty encountered in this research was the lack of scholarly literature available on the public relations strategies of designer fashion organisations. As such, it was necessary to draw from literature in other areas such as creative industries, public relations and branding to provide a comprehensive discussion of the research topic.

A limitation of this study is the use of only four designer fashion organisations. This small scale is a limiting factor on the validity of the generalisations that are made from the data and could possibly make it unable to apply in a wider global context.

Another limitation is that the fashion designers may not have been forthcoming with all of the strategies that they use to construct and communicate their identity,

or the strategies they use for export. This may be because they do not want to share industry secrets that are part of their competitive advantage, stemming from the fear of other fashion organisations using their unique ideas.

Concluding remarks

This chapter explained how an interpretive framework is appropriate for this study as interpretive research is based on the study of the construction and communication of meaning in context (Maxwell, 2005; Schwandt, 2000). Identity, image and branding, the three concepts being studied, are all based on the construction and communication of meaning between an organisation and its publics. As such, the next two chapters use the interpretive methodology to analyse the four cases and answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 5

Constructing and communicating identity

The next two chapters answer the research questions by analysing the four case studies through an interpretive framework. Drawing from contextual information presented in chapter two and literature presented in chapter three, they examine how New Zealand fashion designers construct and communicate a unique and fluid identity. The four case studies being analysed are New Zealand fashion designers and brands: Annah Stretton for *Annah Stretton*, Cybèle Wiren for *Cybèle*, Jo Robertson for *Jo Robertson Maternity*, and Robyn Brooks for *Ooby Ryn*. (Note: Tony Hope was interviewed for *Annah Stretton*).

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section, *developing the business*, discusses how New Zealand fashion designers create their own label and grow their business. It focuses on the support that designers receive and their organic and planned strategies for communication and growth. The second section, *identity, image and branding*, discusses how fashion designers create, communicate and maintain a unique and fluid identity and image. It analyses the various communication tactics designers use and suggests further strategies designers could use to successfully construct and communicate a unique brand identity.

Developing the business

New Zealand fashion designers set up their own fashion label because they have a passion for fashion design and want to work everyday in a job they love. They are

under no illusion that it will be difficult, however they are committed to succeeding in a job that expresses their creativity. While Bill (2004) states that it can be beneficial to study fashion design at a tertiary level, three of the four interviewees did not; Stretton just started working in the industry and Brooks and Wiren studied other creative arts degrees that allowed them to express their creativity and incorporate fashion into their assignments. As these three designers are successfully making a living from their fashion businesses, establishing a successful fashion label is therefore more about having a passion for fashion design than undertaking formal training.

It is the financial aspect of starting a business that all of the interviewees found to be the most challenging. Three of the four designers received financial help from their parents, Brooks commenting that, “if I didn’t have help from them then I probably wouldn’t have been able to do it” (personal communication, October 13, 2008). While they all investigated financial support from other areas, banks were often too wary to lend them the money required to set up the label. This finds support in the literature that many businesses in the creative industries find it difficult to receive financial support due to the risk factors associated with creative businesses (Caves, 2000; Hartley, 2005).

Included in these factors is how traditional business-minded people often perceive creative businesses to lack sustainability and have a high failure rate. Creative businesses also typically have a long period of financial expenditure without income, meaning that they cannot support bank loan repayments. Finally, many creative businesses do not receive financial support due to the lack of a sound business plan. Creating a sound business plan is a struggle for many creative

businesses as they are managed by creative thinkers, not business thinkers (Caves, 2000; Hartley, 2005). To successfully apply for bank loans or other financial grants, fashion designers need to minimise these risk factors. They can do this by participating in a business mentoring or incubation programme, or hiring the services of a business consultant.

Both Wiren and Robertson took steps to minimise their risk factors. When starting her label Wiren actively sought out and participated in a fashion incubation programme funded by Work and Income New Zealand. Through this programme, she learnt valuable business skills relevant to a fashion business. She stated that she,

just made the most of that course, it was a fantastic thing, took us on all sorts of field trips and did lots of cost analysis, break even analysis, profit and loss, understanding the financial side of things, understanding time lines, touched on things like PR. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

This example highlights the importance of a designer to take the initiative to learn about the business aspects of a fashion business, as well as the creative skills.

The incubation programme also assisted Wiren in writing a sound business plan that she used to apply for, and receive, government grants and bank loans. In contrast, Robertson also applied for financial support from the Government but was unable to receive any grants because her business was too advanced and her product was already stocked in retail shops. Robertson is now working closely with NZTE (New Zealand Trade & Enterprise), her marketing firm and her bank

manager to create a business plan to apply for further financial grants and loans to assist in exporting her brand.

Strategic versus organic business growth

A business grows either strategically whereby the growth of the business is executed in accordance with a planned strategy, or organically where the growth of the business is in incremental advancements of sales and production based on an increased demand for the product (Dalton & Dalton, 2006). The identity of a brand can also be built either strategically or organically. A strategic brand is constructed and communicated based on market research and planning. It is deliberately designed to communicate a particular meaning and to connect with certain publics. As such, all aspects of its brand personality and characteristics are purposely chosen. In contrast, an organic brand is not constructed from a planned strategy, but derives its personality and characteristics from the founder and how publics perceive and interact with the brand (Kapferer, 2008).

During the initial stages of the growth and development of their fashion brand, New Zealand fashion designers rarely concentrate on strategically constructing a distinctive identity. Similar to international designers, the majority of New Zealand designers follow an organic process where they initially just design garments that they love and would personally wear, and this becomes their signature style and brand identity (Malem, 2008).

The evolution of the identity of the brand is usually an organic process and the brand evolves, or “grows up”, as many of the designers put it, as the designer gets older and becomes more experienced. Each collection gradually becomes larger

and generally attracts a greater number of stockists. As the business grows and the brand becomes more successful, each designer has evolved the label by adding new products to their brand. Brooks added leather handbags, while Wiren has added knitwear, leather goods and custom-made shoes. Stretton and Robertson have added new brands; Stretton currently has the three brands *Annah Stretton*, *Annah S* and *Garb*, and Robertson has added *Denim42* to her label.

The designers interviewed for this study, initially (if at all) did not have a strategic business growth plan; the strategy that they inherently seem to follow is that of an organic growth strategy. This strategy promotes company growth by selling more product to existing or new customers, selling product at a higher price and expanding internally through relationship building with customers and other key stakeholders (Dalton & Dalton, 2006). New Zealand designers focus on increasing the volume of product they sell by attracting a greater number of retailers, selling more to existing retailers and building a loyal customer base. This is achieved by strengthening and promoting the identity and image of the brand. It follows that the designer's business also expands through necessity, with increased staff, greater manufacturing volumes and more advanced distribution channels.

Although the majority of business and brand growth is organic, as the brand develops the designer begins to communicate more strategically. Instead of just letting the brand develop organically, they take on an active role. Wiren explains that "we make decisions everyday about the identity of the brand and things come along, opportunities come along and we pick and choose what's appropriate and we also strive towards things that we really want to achieve for the brand" (personal communication, October 14, 2008). This attitude develops from a

greater understanding and experience of what has and has not worked for the brand in the past, and a clear vision of where the brand is headed.

Designers need to consider creating a strategic business and communications plan earlier in the business. While organic growth will always be part of the fashion business through unforeseen opportunities that are offered to the designer, designers can build a successful business faster if they have a strong vision and plan to achieve it. This is demonstrated by the *Cybèle* brand. Wiren created a business plan at the beginning of her business through the incubation programme in which she participated. During only five years of business, she has been constantly heralded by the media as New Zealand's "fashion darling" (Hope, 2008), "girl-most-likely-to succeed" (Schaer, 2007) and "one of our fashion industry's brightest hopes" (Mackay, 2007). She has also achieved numerous awards, including the prestigious *Air New Zealand Fashion Export Development Award*. In contrast, Robertson's brand, which has also been in business for five years, has not achieved anywhere near the success of Wiren's brand. This can be attributed to a lack of business planning, which Robertson is only now undertaking.

Survival strategies for fashion businesses

Malem (2008) identified ten long-term survival strategies for small to medium fashion businesses. These are to: understand the business and industry; manage a slow and sustained growth; seek consultancy from other brands and diversify the product range; work to a budget and consolidate contractual agreements; open a retail store; control every aspect of the business; build strong relationships with

manufacturers; communicate effectively with chosen markets; create an international dimension; and to have role models.

While none of the interviewees use all ten strategies, they do use the majority of them. All of the designers demonstrate some understanding of the industry through their use of communication strategies, measures of success and business relationships. However, they do not all demonstrate an understanding that is comprehensive enough to avoid common industry mistakes such as initially using advertising instead of PR or signing unfavourable export contracts. This is largely because an understanding of the industry is often developed through experience, as opposed to knowledge being passed on from industry bodies or role models. If the designers had access to a mentor or more comprehensive information about the industry, they would find it easier to avoid common pitfalls.

It would make sense that, being the fashion industry body who are dedicated to “ensure the sustainability and growth of New Zealand's fashion sector” (FINZ, 2008), FINZ (Fashion Industry New Zealand) would be the organisation who would co-ordinate this transfer of knowledge. One such useful reference that designers could be informed of is Stretton's (2007) autobiography, which gives a “behind the scenes insight into the fashion...world” and claims to be a “valuable references for design students [and] small to medium business owners” (p. back cover).

All of the designers have control over the creative and financial elements of their business. As Canvas magazine describe in an interview with Wiren, “she also seems incredibly well-balanced, working in almost every area of her business: she has done and still does everything from the accounting to the pattern-making”

(Schaer, 2007). Wiren's ability to do so no doubt comes from her participation in the incubation programme that taught her the business skills needed to complement her creative skills. Once again, this highlights the importance of fashion designers learning all of the skills needed to manage a business.

As previously described, all of the designers follow slow and sustained growth through an organic business model. This ensures that they have the production capacity to fulfil orders before signing contracts. In relation to this, all the interviewees have developed strong manufacturing resources, using both large New Zealand-based manufacturing firms such as textile print firms and cut make trim firms, as well as contracting their own sewers to make their garments.

Robertson explains that her demand for high quality product is "one of the reasons we try keep it in house. That's why we like the girls doing it here...being quite local and niche it means that we can keep a really good eye on it" (personal communication, August 28, 2008).

The designers also all have a growing international dimension to their business as will be discussed in more depth in chapter six. Half of the designers have their own retail store, and all of the designers strive to effectively communicate with their chosen audiences.

It is evident through secondary data that the only one of the ten strategies that none of the interviewees utilise is seeking consultancy for other brands. However, other New Zealand fashion designers do so, such as Liz Mitchell for Farmers and Zambesi for Air New Zealand. The reason the interviewees may not do so could be because their brands are not yet recognised at a high enough level by the mass New Zealand consumer market to warrant entering such deals.

Malem (2008) also identifies the need for balance between the practical needs of a fashion business and the creative needs of the business. If the focus is not equal, the business will struggle to succeed. All of the interviewees have worked hard to get the balance of their business right and have achieved it mostly through trial and error. Stretton and Robertson both faced the issue of designing too many “bread and butter” pieces. These are the everyday-wear staple items that are popular with their customers and sell well. According to these designers, it is these pieces that keep the cash flow steady and ensure that the business will survive. However, the design of too many of these pieces was stifling to the creativity of the designers and their brand images. Both Stretton and Robertson became frustrated at the lack of creativity required, Stretton (2007) reflecting that “my passion for the clothing had died, and...my business had become nothing more than a perfunctory way of making money” (p. 88). Their brand images were not being perceived as high-end designer labels by the fashion industry, but as mass-market retail labels. As such, both designers put in place strategies to change this image by rebranding their businesses and launching their new, creative collections at New Zealand Fashion Weeks. On a more positive note, Stretton now explains how “it’s about achieving a balance between designing the artistic, innovative garments that keep me challenged and inspired, while still focussing on their wear-ability and sale-ability” (p. 162).

These examples make the importance of balance clear and also highlight how designers can move too far away from the creative by focussing too much attention on the business elements. The lesson can be learnt that, while a designer does need to have a focus on the business side of their brand, they also need to make sure that they are giving themselves enough freedom to be creative. As

mentioned earlier, it is passion that helps a fashion label to succeed and, as Stretton's quote demonstrates, without creative freedom, this passion can be destroyed.

Identity and branding

Positioning the brand

It is important for designers to accurately position their brand in the market from the outset. Launching a brand is not the same as launching a product (Kapferer, 2008, Wigley, Moore & Birtwistle, 2005), although in the case of a high-end designer fashion brand they are launched simultaneously; the brand is launched through the first collection. In this case, it is important for the designer to understand that they need to communicate the brand identity more strongly than the identity of the collection, otherwise the collection identity will be assumed to be the brand identity (Kapferer, 2008).

It is also important for the brand to act straightaway as if it is already well established and has a distinctive and rich identity. This gives the brand an aura of legitimacy, a feeling that it is accepted and endorsed by the fashion elite as a high-end designer fashion brand. It also helps to convince the audience that the brand has longevity and status (Kapferer, 2008). This is important for attracting stockists who do not want to stock a label that may fold, and consumers who want to wear a label that portrays a particular status.

Through an interpretive analysis of the designers based on this literature, only half of the designers effectively communicated a distinctive and established brand identity through their first collection (Arneson, 2005). Both Wiren and Brooks

chose their market position based on research of what existing brands they wanted to sit alongside and how these brands were priced, what fabrics they were made from, their target audience and their quality. This helped them to ensure that their brands were representative of the status they wanted them to be perceived as having. By showing their first collections at New Zealand Fashion Weeks, they positioned their brands alongside other, well-established brands. Effectively, this transferred the positive image publics had of the established brands to their image of the emerging brands. Consequently, the first collections of these two labels were received well by the media and both designers were successful in gaining a respectable number of stockists, two significant measures of success in the fashion industry. The designers went on to solidify their brand identity through following collections.

In contrast, Stretton and Robertson were more focused on retailing their garments as opposed to launching a complete first collection and creating a distinctive brand identity. This may be due to the designers' initial lack of vision for their brand which, had this been identified early, may have avoided the need for the designers to reposition their brands at a later stage. Brand repositioning will be discussed in more depth later.

A unique identity

Similar to most consumer-driven goods, there is little to functionally differentiate one fashion garment from another. In order to be successful, a designer label needs to have a unique identity (Ferne et al., 1997). New Zealand designers use a variety of symbolic elements as points of differentiation. One such symbol is fabric choice. Brooks and Stretton both select fabrics from agents who visit them

twice yearly with the new seasons fabrics and colours. Stretton strategically chooses fabrics that fit closely with her feminine brand identity and also incorporates fabrics from previous collections into her current collection to create a point of difference from other designers.

Brooks makes many of her fabrics exclusive to her brand. She uses a lot of sumptuous fabrics such as silk and velvet and ensures uniqueness by making sure that no other New Zealand designer can source the same fabrics. Wiren guarantees uniqueness by creating her own custom-made fabrics. She works with her graphic designer to create unique graphic prints for fabrics, which are then printed by a local textile firm. It is apparent from the strategic way that the designers choose their fabrics, and especially how they are made exclusive or designed in-house, that they strongly contribute to the unique identity of the brand.

Stylistic identity is another symbolic element that fashion designers use to differentiate themselves. Stylistic identity in the designer fashion industry refers to the consistent style features that are present throughout a designer's collection (Saviolo, 2002). Fabric cut and draping is one such feature. The media often comment on Wiren's clever and innovative use of pattern making and draping to create a flattering and feminine silhouette. Stretton has differentiated herself through her frou frou designs and extensive use of embellishment. While the *Ooby Ryn* brand is also very feminine, Brooks has built a unique identity by juxtaposing romantic, flowing, silhouettes with bold graphic prints and colours. Robertson uses special cuts and draping to create flattering and comfortable clothing for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Another element of stylistic identity is use of colour. While there are always particular colour trends every season as displayed by fabric representatives, the colours that a designer chooses to use and the way that they use them act as a point of differentiation. Each season Wiren chooses two or three colours to base her collection on. She will use these colours to create coherence throughout her collection, often repeating the same design in a different colour or grouping garments using the same colours together in runway shows. In contrast, Brooks does not choose a particular colour palate. While she does choose fashionable fabric colours, she does not limit herself to a select number as she is inspired by colour and differentiates herself by using a multitude of colours in each collection.

Robertson is very selective in her colour choice as many of her garments are similar styles to previous seasons. To ensure that they will sell well, she must produce them in the new season colours and styles. She explains that:

girls who are pregnant go on that they want comfort and all that stuff but they still want to look like their mate down the road. Just with a belly. You don't want to look like you've been dressed in 1999 when everyone else is dressed in 2008. So I think you're forced to stay in fashion really and keep up...like if we we're putting out maternity clothes that were not in this seasons colours, they just wouldn't move. People would just go out and buy normal clothes and squeeze themselves into them. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

Stretton is also strategic in her choice of colour. Focussing on the business side of design, Stretton keeps “in mind the fact that we used certain colours the previous season” (Hope, personal communication, August 26, 2008) and only chooses fashionable colours that work well with these as a “woman likes to be able to build on previous purchases” (Hope, personal communication, August 26, 2008).

This strategy is to encourage women to buy more of her garments because they can pair them with what they already have in their wardrobes and be assured that they will be able to wear them with her new designs in following years.

This focus on consumers and wear-ability is important in the fashion industry as it helps to build a loyal customer base and an enduring identity (Malem, 2008).

While the other designers have not stated that they also do this, they have also not made it explicit that they consider previous collections when designing the new collection. It may be useful for them to do so as it may make it easier for them to build a loyal consumer base and sell collections to retailers.

Designers also differentiate themselves through additional product ranges. These are often introduced after the brand has become established as “it sort of takes it [the brand] to a different level and that’s part of the evolution of it” (Wiren, personal communication, October 14, 2008). They also act as a way to attract media attention and new consumers to the brand through the addition of an extra, unique element to the collection (Malem, 2008; Manlow, 2007).

As an example, Brooks released a collection of leather belts as part of her first collection. This was a unique and differentiating element for a new designer for, as mentioned, designers usually do not design accessories as part of their first collection. The belts received positive media coverage and sales and as such, Brooks has continued to design new belts for each collection. She also introduced a range of handbags in her autumn/winter 2009 range, which she feels is a natural extension of belts as they share some of the same design principles. In addition, Brooks designed an eco-range for her autumn/winter 2009 collection that has

received extensive media coverage, possibly due to the emerging trend of designers using sustainable and environmentally friendly fabrics.

As well as brand image, additional product ranges also have the ability to increase sales (Malem, 2008). For her ANZFW 2008 show, Wiren had a custom-made shoe designed for all her models to wear down the runway. These shoes were not part of her retail collection, but were an accessory to help communicate the identity of the collection. The shoes received so much media attention and buyer interest that Wiren decided to manufacture and sell them as part of the collection.

As well as demonstrating how additional product ranges contribute to a unique identity, these examples also highlight how consumer demand can have an effect on a designer's brand. In Wiren's case, the custom-made shoes were only manufactured for retail due to consumer demand. This demand was highlighted by the media and used by them to indicate the success and trend-setting characteristic of the *Cybèle* brand. In Brooks' example, she utilised the current societal and very topical trend of sustainability by designing the eco-range. This could be seen as a very strategic decision as it adds value to her brand in numerous ways. It attracts a new type of eco-friendly consumer, positions her brand as forward-thinking and trend-setting and acts as a topical point of difference, attracting media attention.

Brand personality

The identity and personality of a brand cannot be dissociated from the identity and personality of its creator, especially if the brand bears the name of the creator (Kapferer, 2008; Manlow, 2007). This fits with the designers' perception of the identity of their brands. All of the designers believe that their brands are an

extension and reflection of their personal identity and personality. Wiren explains that, “it definitely does come from me, I feel very close to the brand in that it’s definitely a lot of my vision and personal investment of energy and ideas and things. So inevitably it is [similar to my personality]” (personal communication, October 14, 2008).

As the majority of the designers had never thought about their brands having a defined personality before the interview, it can be said that the incorporation of their personality is not a strategic decision but occurs because if the designer “is generating that fashion, it almost happens subconsciously” (Hope, personal communication, August 26, 2008). From an interpretive perspective, it could be said that the designer’s personality is a way of communicating particular meaning about the brand (Arneson, 2005).

Robertson is an interesting example here, as in 2008 she changed the name of her label from *New Life Maternity* to *Jo Robertson Maternity* to reflect the change the label was undergoing from a primarily retail brand to a high-end designer brand. Robertson used her name in the label as a way to give it a “designer feel” as this is what the majority of New Zealand and international high-end designer brands do. This finds support in the literature, which states that the use of a designer’s own name in the brand creates an instant identity and personality for the brand based on the designer’s personality (Manlow 2007). The name change and rebranding as a high-end designer label has given Robertson a greater scope for her designs and allows her to have more fun:

instead of just designing for the average mother that walks in off the street, you are designing for the media, and the retail buyers, and the

overseas market and so you've got to really think about what you're doing, and it's got to be different. And a lot more fun, and creative.
(personal communication, August 28, 2008)

This quote also identifies the recognition designers need to have that by establishing themselves as a high-end designer label they are not just designing for the retail public. Instead, they have a number of publics they need to design for and to effectively communicate their brand identity. It is thus vital for designers to keep all these publics in mind when they are designing their collections as, if it is not different or fun or creative, the designer will face difficulty in actually getting it stocked where their retail public can buy it.

Designing a fluid identity

A fluid identity is one that adapts in response to the current operating environment while still retaining its core values and beliefs (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2005). For a fashion brand to retain its legitimacy in the fashion industry, each seasonal collection needs to include garments that are both innovative and creative yet still reflect and adhere to the core identity and values of the brand. Legitimacy in the fashion industry is largely based on whether a fashion brand can produce styles that are directional and innovative interpretations of trends, but which still reflect the signature style of the designer. It is largely the media who grant legitimacy to a fashion brand through their reviews and use (or lack thereof) of the garments in editorials (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994).

To design a collection that fits with current trends, fashion designers need to be constantly scanning and responding to their environment (Manlow, 2008). Three of the four interviewees rely on fabric representatives to present them with the

fabric and colour trends for the upcoming season. All of the designers research national and international trends through websites such as Vogue, RunwayReporter and Top Shop. They also source trend information through travel or international contacts. Hope gives an example of what can happen if a designer does not integrate forecasted trends into their collection. He explains how Stretton has faced difficulty for not always following trends as,

some products we've put out too early, so we travel we've seen something, we like the concept, we've put it out, it doesn't sell and it's simply been too early, so yeah that definitely proves that you can be outside the square too much. (personal communication, August 26, 2008)

This quote highlights that fashion designers need to produce innovative interpretations of forecasted trends in each collection.

The nature of the fashion industry is that it is comprised of short product life-cycles and designers need to be constantly reinventing their collections and evolving their brand, while still remaining true to the core values of the brand. Described as a fluid identity, it allows a brand to “reflect the speed and innovation and the dynamic nature of the market” (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2005 p.124). To achieve a fluid identity, it is essential for a fashion organisation to have a strong and enduring brand identity so that the collection identity, while having the ability to evolve and add to the brand identity, does not have the power to change it completely (Balmer & Gray, 1999; Manlow, 2007).

To build an enduring brand identity, New Zealand fashion designers do not follow current branding trends in the literature. Current branding literature emphasises

the importance of a planned communications and branding strategy consisting of elements such as: identification and thorough knowledge of all stakeholders; planned communication channels (including embracing new technology); rewarding customer involvement; globalising the brand quickly and being ethical (Gregory, 2004; Kapferer, 2008; Leitch & Richardson, 2003).

While New Zealand designers do use some, if not all, of these elements, they are not part of a planned strategy, nor are they the essential elements in the creation and maintenance of an enduring brand identity. Rather, it can be interpreted that New Zealand fashion designers create an enduring brand identity through the symbolic elements of their brand that differentiate them. The way that they repetitively use fabric choice, colour, cut and draping, pattern making and/or use of graphic prints are all factors which designers become known for, and form a signature style. This signature style becomes the core enduring aspect of their brand identity.

To ensure that their brand identity is integrated throughout their current collection, New Zealand designers rely on gut instinct and advice from their PR firm and/or stylists. When designing the collection, the designers do not pay strategic attention to whether what they are designing fits with the brand identity. Rather, they design garments that they love and can personally identify with, and as their personality is part of the brand identity, the garments are usually representative of the identity of the brand. Towards the end of the collection the designers consult with their PR firms and/or stylists as “bringing in fresh eyes near the end of the design process can definitely assist in taking the collection to a new level, while

ensuring the garments remain true to the brand, vision and culture of the company” (Stretton, 2007, p. 159).

The use of a stylist is also important whenever the collection will be seen or used by media, as they are the main communicators of a fashion brand’s identity. As Stretton (2007) explains, “the stylist also plays an important role in accessorising the collection while thinking about how we might present it on the catwalk, and for photo shoots” (p. 159). To ensure that the collection remains true to the identity of the brand, a stylist strategically chooses symbols that reflect this identity, such as location and props, as well as determining the style of makeup and hair of the models and the accessories used. They also ensure that the lighting and music effectively portray the right atmosphere.

Brand image and the media

As in any industry, a fashion brand is not able to construct its image on its own. In the fashion industry, a brand relies on the media to promote them and portray them in a certain way each season (Kay, 1995). This is preferably positive and in alignment with their brand values and identity. Without this media coverage, a New Zealand fashion label finds it difficult to be recognised by consumers and stockists. While a fashion brand promotes certain aspects of its identity, it is mostly the media who communicate these to the consumer. As such, the media wield a great deal of power. They have the ability to highlight certain elements of a brand’s identity and add elements of their own observations, essentially co-constructing the meaning and image of the brand. Especially in the formative years of a fashion label, the way the media portray the label can have a profound

effect on the brand image as it shapes how the consumer perceives the brand (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2005).

As an example of the image building power of the media, Stretton tried to use the media to reposition her brand image from a retail brand to a high-end designer brand. Stretton used gimmicks such as a boars head and *fa'afafine* models in Fashion Week shows to attract media attention. Ironically, she was frustrated that the media focussed on the gimmicks she used as opposed to the identity of the collection and brand. Stretton consequently toned down these gimmicks and, since 2005, the brand and collection have been well-received by the media. In the end, she did succeed in using the media to change consumer perception of the *Annah Stretton* label to a more sophisticated, high-end designer brand.

Robertson and Brooks have also had issues with the media portraying their brand negatively. Brooks gives the example that,

when my clothes first went on Runway[Reporter], I had a little bit of an argument with Stacey Gregg [journalist and founder of Runway Reporter] and she wrote, it wasn't anything bad about my clothes which was good, she was just not being very nice about the name *Ooby Ryn*. She said it sounds Gaelic and Hessian weave and I should change it. She was just being horrid. (personal communication, October 13, 2008)

Robertson has found that “you can say something to the media and they take it the complete wrong way, and it comes out in the paper and it's not what I meant” (personal communication, August 28, 2008). These three examples suggests that while the designers are aware of the image building power of the media, they do not understand how to effectively communicate their identity to the media or to

target media who will be positive about their brand. Consequently, the media sometimes writes negative comments about the brands, possibly causing more damage to the brand than if it was not given media coverage at all.

The designers have demonstrated that they have begun to learn from their negative experiences by now using PR firms to communicate a consistent message to media. Once again, this is a communication aspect that has had to be learned from experience. This adds weight to the claim that there needs to be a source, perhaps FINZ or tertiary fashion providers, which provides emerging fashion designers with information on media communication and the benefits of hiring a PR firm to do so.

Own-brand stores

An own-brand retail store can be a vital symbol to accurately communicate the identity of the brand to its consumers. When a designer has their own store, they can control the environment, including elements such as innovative interior decorating, garment placement, atmosphere and advertising. All these elements can be designed to reflect the identity of the brand, so when a customer enters the store they immediately experience the vision and values of the brand (Ferne et al., 1997; Guedes & da Costa Soares, 2005).

Robertson and Brooks both have their own retail stores, and Stretton has 30 retail stores. Stretton initially opened her own retail store as she thought she could sell her designs as well as any other retailer could, if not better. After initial success, the chain grew and she now has stores throughout New Zealand with plans to open own-brand stores in Sydney and Melbourne in 2010. For Stretton, having

own-brand stores means that she is in control of the atmosphere of the stores; her garments are not competing with other brands in the same retail space and she can have an influence on the type of people who manage the stores. She also makes sure that,

when it is time for the new ranges to be introduced into our retail network, my focus is on providing our team with the product knowledge and information about the collection they need to ensure they are operating at the highest level in terms of customer service. (Stretton, 2007, p. 161)

It is clear that Stretton understands that communicating the identity of the collection allows her retail staff to sell it convincingly to customers. As Stretton (2007) explains, “it can be a little daunting for our customers to be faced with a whole new range of pieces to choose from, so that knowledge and assistance is vital” (p. 161). This also demonstrates how a fluid identity needs to be managed. If the enduring characteristics present in the new collection are not effectively communicated to staff or customers, their image of the brand may shift and consequently not be aligned with the identity of the brand anymore (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2005).

Brooks also has an own-brand store, with her workspace attached. She decided to open a concept store within the first year of her business as a way to showcase the entire *Ooby Ryn* collection in one place. Retail stores usually only stock selected pieces of each collection and Brooks wanted a place for customers to be able to experience her collection in its entirety. Brooks also stocks a number of other high-end designer labels in the store. Her purpose for this is twofold. Firstly, it gives greater financial security as it increases the number of people attracted to the

store. Secondly, it positions her brand alongside other brands, which have been carefully selected as those that Brooks wants her label to sit beside and to be recognised as having the same status.

Robertson's own-brand store also doubles as her workspace. It is primarily designed as a place where customers can have access to the entire range of stock and where Robertson and her staff can interact with the customers to get a better indication for what they want, what garments they like best and consequently what the brand needs to focus on. Manlow (2007) claims that it is vital for fashion organisations to engage in two-way communication with their target audience in order to understand changing market needs and wants. Robertson demonstrates that own-brand retail stores provide a perfect opportunity to do so. They give the designer the ability to proactively evolve with the market rather than reactively, after receiving negative feedback on a collection. It was through two-way communication that Robertson realised that her core customers wanted high-end designer maternity clothes:

the clientele are telling us they want stuff that's different, they want stuff that's sexy, and nice and...

Interviewer: They want designer clothes but for maternity.

Robertson: Yes. And so our range has definitely changed to what it was when we first started. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

It was this two-way communication that convinced Robertson to drive the label in a new direction, that of high-end designer maternity wear. To launch her new identity and "upmarket the brand" (personal communication, August 28, 2008), Robertson decided to rename the company from *New Life Maternity* to *Jo Robertson Maternity*. She also changed the company's logo and website, as well

as securing a place at ANZFW 2008 where she officially launched the new brand, complete with its first full high-end designer collection.

The collection theme

A theme for a new collection is not typically chosen at the beginning of the design process. Instead, this process usually starts with the fabric. Wiren's design "process is more about looking at colours and fabrics and it really starts there, the colour palate" (personal communication, October 14, 2008). She works with her team to decide on a theme for the prints for her custom-made fabrics. This gives the fabrics coherence; however, this theme does not necessarily become the collection theme. Instead, once the fabrics are made, Wiren lets them "be in the workroom hanging around before we can make any firm decisions. I couldn't really draft a pattern for fabric I haven't seen yet" (personal communication, October 14, 2008). Her designs are consequently created by drawing on the fabric for inspiration.

Stretton and Brooks also start the design process with the fabric. They select fabrics from fabric representatives who present them with the forecasted trends in fabric types and colours, and draw their inspiration from the colours, draping and texture of the fabric. There is always a signature style throughout each designer's collection, but this is inherent to the way the designer designs as opposed to a strategic decision. Wiren explains how she tends to "trust my vision and try not to overanalyse the brand fit or try to sort of force something into a theme" (personal communication, October 14, 2008). This can be linked back to the idea of a designer needing creative freedom, which, as stated earlier, is essential for maintaining their passion for the brand.

While fabrics act as a source of inspiration to influence the design, the designers still focus on the forecasted trends for the season they are designing. If they do not do this, they risk being negatively portrayed in the media. They also run the risk of gaining less editorial coverage. Brooks provides an example of this by explaining that magazine editors will do a spread on a current trend, for example, spots. They will go to a showroom and pick out all the garments that have spots. If you do not have spots in your collection, you do not have any chance of being chosen for that spread, or the numerous others on spots that will be done throughout the season. It is thus important for designers to interpret current trends in their collections so they are publicised when the media are discussing “what’s hot” for the upcoming season.

The idea of a coherent collection “theme” is generally used only for media purposes. While designers often have a single point of inspiration, for example, in 2008 Wiren’s source of inspiration was the Kingfisher bird, and Stretton’s was Japanese tattoos, they do not use this as the overall theme of their collection, rather just as an initial point of inspiration. It is the PR firm that often turns the point of inspiration into a theme or creates a theme that the designs fit into to provide a catchy way to promote the collection and brand to the media. This theme is presented to the media through press releases, lookbooks and fashion shows.

As an example, Brooks states that,

some people say their theme is based on a circus or something, but I don’t, I don’t understand that for my brand, I don’t work like that. So I just work off the fabrics. Well I look at overseas trends to see what’s

going to be in for next season, but I don't have an actual theme.
(personal communication, October 13, 2008)

However, her press releases for each collection use a theme to describe the collection. According to her most recent press release, the *Ooby Ryn Summer 2008* collection was based on a “dreamtime” theme in which you “fall down a rabbit hole and enter a fantastical realm; where scented rushes billow in the breeze, bees feast on a meadow of water coloured blooms and mythical creatures frolic in the dappled sunlight” (Coco PR, 2008). It is evident that Brooks' PR firm have used this theme to give the collection a distinctive personality and point of difference in order to attract media and buyers.

The creation and communication of a theme by a PR firm could be viewed as a misrepresentation of the brand. However, the designers do not seem to view it as such. Hope explains that he understands that it is because “people are looking for fresh product and therefore you do need to have a story, a new story, and that's sometimes just the marketing edge” (personal communication, August 26, 2008).

From this, the collection theme can be interpreted as a strategic construction and communication of the identity of the brand. It is interesting that the designers typically let their PR firms develop the theme; this demonstrates that while they may understand the use of a collection theme in communicating identity, they do not know how to construct or communicate it. Or, it could indicate that they do not really care about what the theme is, provided the collection and brand is effectively promoted. As such, this would become one of the purposes of hiring the services of a fashion PR firm.

Manufacturing

As the designer's personality is a key factor in the identity of the brand, the brand values are largely based on their personal values and beliefs. A very strong belief common to all the interviewees is manufacturing their products in New Zealand.

The designers all echo Wiren's belief that, "I choose to keep making in New Zealand because I want to support the New Zealand economy and I care about the local environment" (Wiren, as cited in Schaer, 2007, p. 2). Hope states that it is part of the Stretton company culture and beliefs as they are "proud of it and we like it and we kind of like the positive image for us, you know the positive feel it has for us and our team. So it just works with who we are and what we want to be" (personal communication, August 26, 2008).

It is also a way to keep an element of quality control over their products, as the designers are able to directly employ sewers with the specific skills they require. Manufacturing onshore also benefits the customer. Robertson explained that "if I manufacture in New Zealand and something goes wrong you can get it fixed overnight, whereas if it was manufactured in China it would be a little bit different" (personal communication, August 28, 2008). The customer is thus able to get their garment back sooner than they would if it was manufactured offshore.

All the designers promote their garments as being New Zealand-made, however they state that they do not focus on this as a point of differentiation. The majority of them consider New Zealand-made as more of an assurance of quality and an indication of the "Kiwi" values of the brand, as opposed to a unique factor.

However, just the fact that they are being promoted by their PR companies as being New Zealand-made indicates that this is a differentiating factor. In the

interview, Brooks stated that, “I don’t push it strongly, but in my press releases they always write that everything’s made in New Zealand” (personal communication, October 13, 2008), showing that while she may not understand the value of this unique factor, her PR company does. The fact that the majority of media articles about the *Ooby Ryn* brand mention that the label is “proudly designed and made in New Zealand” (Camp, 2007; Ooby Ryn, 2007; Ooby Ryn, 2008; TVNZ, 2008), a direct quote from her press releases, suggests that the media also consider this a unique and differentiating factor.

Wiren seems to be the only interviewee that understands the value of promoting her brand as New Zealand-made. This is expressed through her statement:

I know that it’s really valued by most of our customers at a retailing and a wholesaling level. And by the media. People often ask me about it, it’s become quite a topical subject of conversation and point of difference for brands at this point, just in the last year or two.
(personal communication, October 14, 2008)

Her statement also highlights that the majority, if not all, of the brand’s publics appear to regard New Zealand-made as a differentiating factor and perceive this as adding value to the brand.

Three of the four designers stated that they would consider moving manufacturing offshore if it became critical to the financial success of the business, particularly if they received large export orders that could not be viably filled in New Zealand. Contrary to what a number of scholars suggest (Cateora & Graham, 2005; Lim & O’Cass, 2001; Mulvagh, 2003), the designers do not think that this would affect

their brand image, as they believe that the image of their designs is not based on where the clothes are made.

Hope gave the example of one of New Zealand's top fashion designers, Trelise Cooper, in relation to this. He explained that "Trelise Cooper's product is predominately made offshore but it's still seen as exclusive and elitist and worthy of \$450 a blouse" (personal communication, August 26, 2008). However, as the PR firms these designers belong to all promote their New Zealand-made garments as a point of difference, it follows that the designers brand images would be affected. They may not receive negative publicity for it, but would miss out on the positive publicity and connotations that they currently receive with their products being made in New Zealand.

Fashion designers and celebrities

Although most organisations in image-based industries actively seek out celebrity endorsement (Gwinner, 1997; O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1998), New Zealand fashion designers do not. New Zealand designers believe that when the media does publicise a celebrity wearing their garments it reflects positively on their brand image; however, it is not part of their PR strategy to dress celebrities for events or otherwise. The designers think that when a celebrity does wear one of their designs, "it's something that should come naturally, there should be that fit there, that they love it and that they seek it out to some degree as well, its not something that we push" (Wiren, personal communication, October 14, 2008). Actively seeking out the label does suggest that the celebrity is a good fit with the brand's image and values. This good fit between the celebrity image and the

fashion brand image is essential, as it is the only way the celebrity's image can enhance the fashion brand's image (Becker-Olson & Hill, 2006; Gwinner, 1997).

However, designers do not need to wait for celebrities to seek out their designs for them to be a good fit. They can also identify celebrities who are a good fit with the brand based on their knowledge of the celebrity's personality and style. They can then actively seek out endorsement from the celebrity with free or loan garments for events, or publicise the brand to the celebrity by inviting them to attend fashion shows with the hope that the celebrity will chose to wear the brand publicly.

While media coverage of celebrities wearing a designer's label is good for the labels brand image, it does not always translate into sales (O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1998). The *Cybèle* label received extensive media coverage in 2007 when Kate Hudson, a famous Hollywood celebrity, was photographed buying *Cybèle* designs at a New York store. While this story was aired on the New Zealand six o'clock news and in major newspapers, Wiren did not notice any impact on her sales.

In contrast, Brooks does use celebrity endorsement to boost sales. She claims that, "it's just good to be able to tell other shops and other people because then they think someone famous is wearing your clothes so it makes them want them" (personal communication, October 13, 2008). It may be that with Brooks only being an emerging designer, celebrity endorsement gives her brand the credibility and status it needs for retailers to stock her brand. For Wiren, an established designer, the New Zealand market may be so saturated with her product that,

while celebrity endorsement enhances her brand image, there is little room for her sales to grow.

Stretton views celebrities wearing her garments as a relationship building exercise. Being a high-profile business and media personality herself, Stretton is often asked by women in the industry for an *Annah Stretton* garment to wear for a certain occasion. Stretton will “give her a lend garment or a freebie and it’s just as much not PR for the night and the product, as it’s a balance of also supporting the relationship” (Hope, personal communication, August 26, 2008). So, while the celebrity wearing the label is good for the *Annah Stretton* brand image, this is not the primary reason Stretton dresses celebrities.

Celebrity endorsement may not currently be a key PR tactic in New Zealand as New Zealand has typically lacked events and occasions for celebrities to wear designer outfits to that will also promote the designer. However, this is changing as New Zealand media develops. The introduction of the New Zealand television channel C4 has created an increase in media coverage of New Zealand award shows and events. This coverage is often modelled on Hollywood coverage, which includes red carpet reporting of the celebrities promoting the designer(s) they are wearing. New Zealand gossip magazines such as *Women’s Day* are also including in their photo captions the designer(s) that the pictured celebrity is wearing. Finally, television show hosts are increasingly promoting designers, for example, Sonia Gray from *Wheel of Fortune* wears and promotes a different designer outfit each evening. As this is all free publicity, New Zealand designers need to consider actively seeking out celebrities or media personalities to wear

their designs, especially if the event or occasion will receive national or international media coverage.

Fashion designers and sponsors

Similar to international fashion designers, New Zealand designers seek sponsorship for ANZFW. Sponsorship of a designer in this event takes three forms: financial, product, and service. Some sponsors fall into more than one category.

Financial sponsorship is where the sponsor injects money into a designer's show in return for their company name and logo being used for publicity purposes.

Financial sponsorship is often the only way a designer can afford to have a solo show at ANZFW due to the high cost of producing a show. Sponsors are chosen because "they are just really great brands that fit well with our brand, [and] good people to work with" (Wiren, personal communication, October 14, 2008). It is important to have a good fit between the fashion label and the sponsor's brand as the closer the fit, the more favourably each brand is perceived by stakeholders (Becker-Olson & Hill, 2006). When the fit is low, publics will experience inconsistency, leading them to question the motives for each party's involvement in the sponsorship deal. This will result in a negative perception towards both of the brands and consequently, a weakening of their brand images (Becker-Olson & Hill, 2006).

Product sponsorship is where a company donates a certain volume of products for placement in a designer's goodie bags for their show. These goodie bags are given to the media, buyers, sponsors and public who attend the show. While the sponsor

does not officially receive any further publicity from the designer, the media often detail what products are in each designer's goodie bags so they receive further publicity through this. Similar to financial sponsorship, designers choose product sponsors based on the image of the product and how it fits with their brand image.

An analysis of the ANZFW media shows that designers can be judged quite critically by the New Zealand media on the content of their goodie bags. For example, the New Zealand Herald ANZFW reporters rate each of the designer's goodies bags out of 10 in their ANZFW reviews:

Designer: Serdoun

Goodie bag dissection: Hmm interesting... A packet of Light n' Tasty cereal and yes, more Eden chocolate. What message is this bag trying to give us? It's okay to eat chocolate all day long if you've had a healthy breakfast?

Rating: 3/10 It's only day two and we're on chocolate overload. (Hunkin, 2007)

Designer: Huffer

Goodie bag dissection: Yellow spongy ball with Huffer logo, Eden chocolate. Will we ever eat this chocolate again? Offering it around at the after-after-party, no-one else seemed too keen.

Rating: 4/10

Designer: Charmaine Love

Goodie bag dissection: A TVNZ T-shirt(!?), Schwarzkopf hair products, Mac lipglass, M&Ms in a paint test pot, and a Marquis condom (and lube!).

Rating: 5/10 (but bonus points for sheer weirdness). (Gibb, 2007)

These examples demonstrate that the designers need to make sure that the product sponsors they use do have the right image among those who will be receiving

goodie bags. This will result in positive media coverage about the goodie bags which will enhance their brand identity. It also adds value to their sponsorship agreements as the sponsors also receive positive media coverage.

Service sponsorship is where a company donates their services during the production of a show. An example of this is Phoenix Cosmetics doing all of the make-up for Stretton's 2008 ANZFW show, or Steven Marr doing hair for all Wiren's ANZFW shows. The designers strive to build a good relationship with these sponsors to form an ongoing partnership. These sponsors are chosen based on their expertise and their ability to accurately interpret and communicate the designer's vision of the collection. In return, these sponsors are publicised to the show audience, are stated in promotional material and are mentioned in media interviews about the show.

The identification of sponsors is both through actively seeking sponsorship and through being approached by sponsors. All of the interviewees agree that both situations happen relatively equally. When seeking sponsorship, the designers choose brands that they personally identify with. Brooks explains how she chooses sponsors to fit with her brand identity through the example, "I just liked all their [Alcabello's] bags and Paul's [Williams] jewellery, so I think that just comes back to the personality of my designs as well and if I like it then obviously it would go" (personal communication, October 13, 2008).

This, and the previous examples, demonstrates that the designers understand that sponsorship can be used to communicate their brand identity, however it does not indicate that the designer strategically uses sponsorship to do so. Rather, it appears that the designers think that if the brand images fit then they will use the

sponsor. Sponsorship seems to be just a way for the designer to be able to afford to stage an ANZFW show as opposed to being a way to communicate a particular meaning about the identity of the brand. Designers could strategically use sponsorship by choosing sponsors that do not just fit with their current brand image, but with the brand image they want their publics to perceive them as having. Once again, this goes back to the need to have a communications plan and a clear vision for the brand. A clear vision will give the designers a goal to strive for and sponsors can be strategically chosen to help them reach this goal.

Communicating through advertising

Many scholars think it is crucial for fashion brands to advertise to attract stockists and customers and to communicate their identity (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994; Kay, 1995; Kapferer, 2008; Manlow, 2007, Maramotti, 2005). However, the majority of New Zealand designers do not use any form of advertising to communicate with their audiences. Three of the four interviewees have used advertising previously, mainly because at the beginning of their business they thought that advertising was the only way to gain publicity. However, they all expressed disappointment with the poor response that they received from their advertisements, especially in relation to the high cost output.

All three designers tried advertising in various publications, finding more success with some than others, but never feeling as though they were gaining any significant value from the advertisements. Brooks explains that, “I don’t really see the point now in advertising...I don’t really get anything out of it. But with editorial [a PR tactic], like with Canvas and Sunday [magazines], I get people ringing all the time” (personal communication, October 13, 2008). Similar to

Brooks, instead of advertising the rest of the designers now use PR techniques to publicise and communicate meaning about their brand.

Wiren was the only designer who has never used advertising for her brand. This is because she hired a PR firm when setting up her brand and they effectively promoted her brand through PR tactics. Again, this highlights the need for fashion designers to hire a PR firm near the beginning of their business. Doing so would allow designers to invest less money in promoting the brand, yet receive a higher output of brand recognition and understanding.

PR communication techniques

All of the interviewees have found that PR has been more beneficial in communicating with their target audiences than advertising. They all currently employ PR firms, which they regard as a valuable part of their business. Three of the four designers employ fashion specific PR firms for a similar reason to Stretton:

anyone in PR, it's what they do. And they have connections that we would never presume to be able to make...everyday he's [PR consultant] talking, thinking, breathing, living, growing with the fashionista and also with the generation. He's younger, he's cool, and a lot of the writers, a lot of the people, you know, that's who they circulate with and spend time with so it just makes sense to. (Hope, personal communication, August 26, 2008)

It is evident that Hope regards the fashion specific contacts that the PR consultant has as an essential aspect of PR. He also gives the impression that a PR firm is

necessary for a fashion business as they have industry specific skills that are needed for a fashion brand to succeed.

The PR firms produce all press releases for the designers. The press release explaining a new collection is especially important, as it is this that is sent to all media, including stylists, fashion websites and fashion magazine/newspaper editors. The PR firms also handle all media enquiries, including acting as an intermediary for the media to organise interviews for profile pieces on the designer. All of the interviewees stated that this was because “if we’re paying someone to do it, let them do it. And again it’s consistent, there’s a consistent point of contacts, consistent message and consistent accountability” (Hope, personal communication, August 26, 2008).

To ensure that this consistent message remains accurate, the PR firms and designers keep in close contact. Wiren explains the process of how she works with her PR consultant:

I definitely have to keep Chris informed of what’s going on. Most of the media goes through Chris, some come direct, but I think it’s important to keep some sort of consistency with the process. Ideally, they go back to Chris then back to me. Just to keep that consistency there with the process. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

It is evident from these examples that consistency is a key service that PR firms provide fashion brands. This ensures that the identity of the brand is accurately communicated to media and that accurate records of what and how media are publicising the brand can be kept. This archive is important for the fashion

designer and PR firm so they know what media are likely to publicise the brand positively and thus which media to target/avoid.

Specialist fashion PR firms produce a number of communication tactics that general PR firms do not. This includes having showrooms to display the designer's brand. The showroom stocks the entire current and upcoming collections, which the media and stylists can visit and select clothing from for editorials. The showrooms are staffed by a Showroom Manager who typically does not come from a PR background, as their main job is to manage and record the use of the garments as opposed to tactical PR.

Editorials consist of fashion spreads and features in magazines and newspapers. All the designers view editorials as the best form of publicity for their labels. The reason they are so successful is because they are a third party endorsement, where the magazine or newspaper is approving and promoting the designs and/or the brand as opposed to the designer promoting themselves through advertising (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994). Placement in editorials is a way for the designer to communicate a particular meaning about their brand. Their garments are usually chosen as part of the theme of the editorial, and show the reader how to style the garment and what image it will give them if they wear it. Their garments are also displayed alongside other designers, which can serve to add status to the designer's brand image.

The designers have all found that they need a fashion PR firm to get them editorial as they do not have the industry contacts or time to do so themselves. As Brooks comments, "to get your brand more noticed and in the public you have to get a lot of editorial and that's what they [the PR firm] focus on" (personal

communication, October 13, 2008). Again, this corresponds with how the industry specific skills and contacts that fashion PR firms provide are critical to the success of a fashion brand.

Fashion PR firms also produce lookbooks for each collection. Lookbooks are a compilation of photos of each garment in the collection. The photos of the autumn/winter collection are often taken during the designer's catwalk show at Fashion Week, and the spring/summer collection (which is not shown at Fashion Week) through a photo shoot. Lookbooks are a strategically designed symbol to communicate the identity of the collection and the brand. This is through styling techniques such as hair and makeup, accessories, props and the layout of the book. Lookbooks are used to send to stylists, fashion editors and potential buyers/agents. They are also published on the designer's website.

Communication through websites

All of the designers interviewed launched websites as one of the initial communication tactics of their business. They believe that a website is essential to communicate with their stakeholders as it provides interested consumers, stockists and media a chance to understand the identity of the brand, the success of the brand and gives contact details. As such, a fashion designer's website can be considered a strategic and symbolic representation of their brand identity. Stuart and Jones (2004) confirm the importance of a website for building and maintaining brand image. They state that a website is able to communicate a controlled brand identity, and should be visually and textually constructed in a way that supports and reinforces the brand.

An analysis of the four designer's websites shows that they all utilise common features to communicate meaning. One feature is how they all show lookbook images of current and past collections. This communicates the identity of the brand and each collection, and encourages audiences who see something they like to either buy it from the website or visit a retail stockist. All of the designers have webpages detailing the label's brand identity, the designer's personality and showcasing the media coverage the brand has received. This extensive range of information is enabled by the internet's capacity to convey large amounts of detail and text (Stuart & Jones, 2004) and highlights the ability of a website to communicate the identity and success of the brand. The website can also be used as a tool to introduce the brand to new markets. Stretton is an example of this; her website has a purchasing function that enables customers from anywhere around the world to purchase her garments.

The designers attract people to their website by promoting it through their press releases and at the events and shows they participate in. Their website links are also on fashion websites that feature profiles of the designers, such as FashionNZ and RunwayReporter. These are visited by fashion consumers and are a useful way to publicise the brand and website. Magazines that do profile pieces on the designer may also publish the designer's website as a source of further information.

Fashion shows and identity

The other major communication tool that the PR firms work with the designer on is the organisation of the runway show and surrounding media for Air New Zealand Fashion Week shows. Their input is critical as all of the designers stated

that Fashion Week is the one of the most important branding tools for their label. Robertson describes how her first participation in Fashion Week boosted her branding and sales before the event had even started:

we had a shop in Auckland the other day who, six months ago, said they wouldn't touch me, two weeks ago emailed me and said, "we need your stuff, people are coming and asking for it". And that's the whole point of doing Fashion Week, to lift the tempo a bit. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

She goes on to say that "yes we need to find some buyers, but it's more about really pushing the brand and getting some really good brand awareness and getting the media to know we are there" (personal communication, August 28, 2008). This example demonstrates how the media, in the build-up to Fashion Week, can be just as influential in the consumers' and retailers' perception of the brand image, as post-Fashion Week media. As such, designers and their PR firms need to focus on building hype around the brand's participation in Fashion Week prior to the event, as well as concentrating on the actual event itself.

Coming from a more experienced evaluation of Fashion Weeks due to her five years of participation, Wiren describes Fashion Weeks as,

a huge branding exercise for the brand because it's really the best way to showcase the identity of the brand and the identity of each collection because they do change and it is new each season. It's just the best way to bring it to life and give it some attitude and so the branding value of the shows is huge. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

The most important idea that can be interpreted from this is the way Wiren feels that Fashion Weeks bring life and attitude to a collection (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). This is a crucial idea in communicating the identity of the brand as it is this particular meaning that helps to give a brand its personality and uniqueness. By bringing it alive to an audience, they are able to understand and relate to it better. This helps them forge a connection with the brand, consequently buying it or giving it media coverage.

For emerging labels, ANZFW is the best way to be promoted nationally as the brand name is on all national ANZFW publicity materials, is promoted on the ANZFW website and is included in media previews and reviews. An emerging designer's participation in ANZFW also indicates to the media, buyers and consumers that the brand has the same status and profile as the already established designer labels it is showing alongside. It is expensive for any designer to produce a show, but emerging designers especially find it difficult as they typically have less money and are unable to attract the same level of sponsorship.

For this reason, half the designers interviewed initially participated in group shows to reduce the cost. Both Wiren and Brooks participated in *Verge Breakthrough Designer* shows, which not only reduced the cost of participation, but also mentored the designers through the process of staging a show. With group shows, as the designer is sharing a show with others, they do not receive as much runway time or as much control over the set design. However, this is compensated by the designer still receiving publicity and experience at a more affordable cost. As publicity is vital for the success of emerging fashion designers, participation in ANZFW as soon as the designer can afford to is necessary and

should be a priority for emerging fashion designers. Robertson clearly understands this as,

next year we're hoping we've got enough models to do a catwalk show so we can say we're the first maternity label to do a catwalk show there which would be great. But it's whether we can find enough models to do it, or find enough money to pay a modelling agency to give us the models. That would be my ultimate dream, because that would be such a good thing for the media. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

Unfortunately for Robertson, pregnant models are more difficult to find and modelling agencies charge a lot more for their use than for normal models. However, it is clear that Robertson understands the value of having a unique element to her show that will attract media attention, and is striving towards that goal.

ANZFW is primarily a trade show, attended by buyers and the media. A brand's purpose for having a show is to secure national and/or international buyers or agents, and to present themselves to the media in a way that encourages them to endorse and positively promote the brand. It is important for the runway show to communicate the true identity of the brand to attract the right type of buyers and so the media can communicate it accurately.

To communicate brand identity, designers use symbolic elements such as music, location, lighting, staging, setting and celebrities. Music is an element that is given much consideration as it is one of the key elements in setting the atmosphere of the show, affecting everything from the mood of the audience to the speed the models walk the runway. Music is often reported on in the media as

a way to communicate the atmosphere and identity of the collection. For example, reviews of *Cybèle* shows have expressed that “industrial music set a hard-edged tone” (Robinson, 2007) and “undisturbed by strife, turmoil or war -or the turbulent soundtrack to the show- clothes at *Cybèle’s* fashion week show floated down the runway like peaceful birds in the midst of a storm, oblivious of the chaos around them” (Zwitser, 2008).

The way that the media report on an ANZFW show is one of the most critical forms of brand communication for a designer. During ANZFW, a high-end designer’s target consumer is hyperaware of what the media is reporting, as this is one of their main sources of information about their favourite designers’ new collections, upcoming fashion trends and hot new designers. As such, they actively seek out articles about show previews and reviews. It follows that this is a crucial time for a designer to capture the interest of consumers. If they can impress the media with their show and designs, or use a gimmick that is worthy of media coverage, the target audience will have a greater chance of reading about their brand. The more the target consumer reads about a brand during this week, the greater the chance they will give the brand higher status as greater media exposure in an image-based industry, and association with other high-end designer labels, serves to create a more desirable image for the brand (Saviolo, 2002).

Due to its strong branding potential, ANZFW is used by designers to evolve the identity of their brand. Wiren and Brooks have used Fashion Weeks to introduce new products, such as handbags and knitwear, to their brand. Robertson chose to exhibit at ANZFW for the first time to launch her rebranded label and gain

national media attention. Stretton has strategically used Fashion Weeks to not only evolve the identity of her brand, but to change the fashion industry and public's perception of her brand. In 2003, she chose to show at Fashion Week to present her brand to the industry and public as a high-end fashion brand as opposed to a "mall-store" brand. She did this by shocking the crowd with her collection *Feral Beauty*. This successfully generated large amounts of media attention and, while it was not all positive, it did create national recognition for her brand at a high-end designer level.

Cause-related activities and identity

As fashion designers have become celebrities in their own right, they are often asked to participate in cause-related activities and projects (Manlow, 2007). In New Zealand, where there are very few high profile celebrities, fashion designers are often used to endorse a product. Wiren and Stretton are heavily involved in charity and community work through their brands and have both been involved in many design projects for causes, for example designing t-shirts for the Breast Cancer Research Trust. As well as Brooks, they also participate in local community events and shows, for example school or charity events.

Participating in cause-related activities provides a fashion label with the opportunity to build brand awareness and create positive associations for their brand image (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, Toth, & Van Leuven, 2004). However, it is evident that for the interviewees, their participation is not a strategic business decision; they participate "just to help out really" (Brooks, personal communication, October 13, 2008) and because they enjoy giving back to the community. Stretton (2007) undertakes mentoring and charity work because she

has reached a level of success in the industry that gives her the “opportunities to make a difference, to contribute and to pay it forward” (p. 202), not because she needs to build her brand.

It is apparent that the majority of designers believe that it is only a secondary benefit that their participation in cause-related activities serves to enhance their brand image. Wiren is the only designer who is more strategic in her approach to what she calls “special projects”, stating, “we have always been willing to give those things a go, see where they lead and they have always paid off really well” (personal communication, October 14, 2008). However, she still emphasises that she mainly does them because they are “always really great fun, really challenging and interesting...and it goes to a great cause as well” (personal communication, October 14, 2008).

The designers need to recognise that their participation in cause-related activities can also be part of a strategic communications plan to communicate a particular meaning about their brand and build a positive brand image. New Zealand designers have a unique opportunity to participate in a wide variety of activities as New Zealand does not have a lot of high profile celebrities. The designers already take advantage of this; however, by actively generating more publicity about the projects/events they participate in, designers can increase their media profile and use something they enjoy doing to also build a positive brand image.

Repositioning a brand

If a brand does not initially build a coherent and enduring identity, it may be necessary to reposition the brand at a later stage of business. Repositioning a

brand is more than just changing the symbolic aspects of the brand, for example, the logo, website or name. It also includes changing how the industry and target consumers perceive the brand (Wong & Merilees, 2007). Both Stretton and Robertson have repositioned their brands more than once in an attempt either to move the brand in a direction that they were happier with, or to gain a greater share of the consumer market. Robertson gives the example of why she renamed her brand from *New Life Maternity* to *New Life Clothing*:

we've tried to, two or three years ago, to drop the *Maternity* off the *New Life*, and that was more to try and to broaden our market, to sell to people who weren't pregnant, but that actually backfired on us because we actually lost what we did, like people didn't acknowledge then that *New Life* was a maternity brand and the girls who weren't pregnant weren't coming to us either. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

This highlights the importance of a brand name as a communication of identity. The name is usually the first contact a person has with a brand and, if it does not communicate the identity of the brand, the person may not, as in Robertson's case, give the brand any more of their attention. To change this, Robertson renamed the brand again, this time to *Jo Robertson Maternity*. This name was strategically chosen for two reasons; *Maternity* was chosen to regain her core consumer of pregnant women, and *Jo Robertson* was added to give the brand an immediate high-end designer image.

Stretton's fashion brand *Annah S*, began as a retail fashion label and was designed for the mass market. To reposition her brand as a high-end designer brand, Stretton added a new label, *Annah Stretton*, to her brand. She launched this at

Fashion Week 2003, as discussed earlier, and has succeeded in changing her retail image to a high-end designer image. This can be seen by her acceptance into ANZFW, the *Air New Zealand Fashion Development Export Award* she won, and the way the media portray her brand.

Stretton has recently been working with a brand consultant to identify the core identity of her labels so that she can communicate a consistent brand identity to the industry and consumers. Hope describes how,

in the past, over two or three seasons, that [the brand's] story would've been very different by concept, by mood, by emotion, by motivation, by whatever Annah felt like doing. ...Brian's [brand consultant] involvement is helping Annah simply say look, let's have a great story...and let's get it tight, let's get it deep, narrow and clean. And then we can hammer it home, hammer it home, hammer it home.
(personal communication, August 26, 2008)

It is evident that the use of a brand consultant is a strategic tool for the *Annah Stretton* brand in trying to consolidate its fractured identity. However, it seems contradictory that Stretton feels the need to create a consistent identity using two sources, a brand consultant and a PR firm. There is the possibility that the PR firm is unable to offer adequate branding and identity services which, being a PR firm, should really be a core service. Alternatively, Stretton may not understand that a consistent message should come from one source, not multiple sources.

Concluding remarks

This chapter first examined how New Zealand fashion designers set up their own fashion label and moved on to analyse how they construct and communicate a

unique and fluid brand identity. The next chapter will follow on from this by discussing how fashion designers measure the success of their business and brand. It will then analyse the communication strategies the designers use to export their brand and how the New Zealand identity affects this communication and the perception of the brand internationally.

CHAPTER 6

The exporting experience

This chapter follows on from the previous analysis chapter by first discussing the three factors New Zealand fashion designers use to measure the success of their business and brand. After reaching a certain level of success in the New Zealand market, the next step for designers is to export their brand. Therefore, this chapter analyses how designers prepare to export, the strategies they use to successfully communicate their brand to international markets and how the New Zealand national identity affects their brand and their brand communication internationally.

Measuring success

According to Caves (2000), the creative industries are an amalgamation between creative expression and making money. Fashion designers begin their fashion labels with the intention of doing a job they love, creating clothes; however they quickly face the conflict of having to make money from this endeavour to pay for resources such as fabric, manufacturing, PR and wages. As the business grows, designers are put under even greater pressure to succeed financially so they can hire and support staff, grow the business further and export their brand.

Skov (2002) discusses how many fashion designers tend to measure success by the amount of money they make, a perception that is ingrained in Western society through its capitalist culture. However, if designers take this attitude, they will be disappointed. Success in fashion design cannot be based on the bottom line, as

designer fashion is not usually a very profitable business, especially for small designer labels. It is reassuring that the interviews suggest that, while New Zealand fashion designers do measure success based on the bottom line, it is not the only determination of success (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). In fact, it is often only a measure indicating the designer can support and grow the business. Fashion designers tend to place greater emphasis on measuring success based on three other aspects: sales, media and feedback.

Success based on sales encompasses the amount of stockists the brand has. This is made up of both the number of new stockists the brand gets from each collection and whether they have lost any previous stockists. Loss of stockists may occur because the previous collection did not sell well in their store, or they do not like the look of the new collection. Success is also determined by the type of stockists wanting to retail the label, whether it is a boutique store that stocks unknown labels or one that stocks high profile labels, or large designer department stores such as Myer in Australia. International stockists are another measure of success, both the number and type of retailers and what markets they come from.

Success through media is based on “who’s interested and who’s requesting it and what sort of editorial we get and what sort of profile pieces” (Wiren, personal communication, October 14, 2008). The type of media that is requesting the garments for editorials or writing profile pieces reflects the image and status of the brand; most New Zealand high-end designers strive to be featured in *Fashion Quarterly* as this is the epitome of New Zealand fashion magazines. Media perception of the brand is also an indicator of whether the brand is successfully communicating its identity. For instance, if the brand is being approached by one

genre of media only, for example, rock 'n' roll magazines, it indicates that the media perceive the brand to be part of this genre. This is positive if the identity of the brand is reflective of rock 'n' roll culture, but negative if it is not.

Feedback from customers and retailers is another measure of success. The most obvious feedback is if retailers like the new collection, continue to stock the brand and, especially, if they increase their order. Some retailers also give feedback to the designer about the quality of the garments. Robertson proudly gives the example:

we get that [positive feedback] a lot from our retailers that they hardly ever get any returns from our product because of anything that's gone wrong with them, things like that, whereas they've got other brands that they are constantly getting returns on. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

From this, it can be understood that high quality garments are another differentiating factor for a designer, even though the term high-end fashion designer is synonymous with quality and it would be expected that all high-end designer garments are of a high quality. Customer feedback is also very satisfying for a designer and retailers will often stock a brand because "people are coming and asking for it" (Robertson, personal communication, August 28, 2008).

A final measure of success is the ability of the business to successfully export the brand. The media usually portray a designer as successful when they begin exporting and usually list the countries of export in any feature piece about the designer or brand. The designers themselves consider exporting to be a measure

of success as it signifies not only consumer and financial growth, but also recognition of the brand by other markets as desirable.

Exporting New Zealand designer fashion

The motivation to export

The reason that the majority of designer fashion businesses decide to export is due to market saturation in their local market (Moore et al., 2000). This holds true for New Zealand designers. The New Zealand designer fashion industry is limited because there is only a small percentage of the population who aspire to and can afford to wear high-end designer fashion. As Wiren explains:

export is definitely part of the future because the brand is boutique and there's only so far we can expand in New Zealand and keep that boutique image and also because there just isn't the population here to support a huge growth for the brand. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

New Zealand small to medium enterprises are encouraged to export by the New Zealand Government, especially those industries such as designer fashion which positively enhance the reputation of New Zealand internationally (NZTE, 2008). A fashion designer's brand also benefits from exporting as the New Zealand public recognise exporting as a sign of business success. For a fashion label to say that it exports gives status to its brand image. In turn, this attracts new customers, stockists and media attention.

Preparing to export

According to Jeannet and Hennessey (2004), for a brand to successfully export, it is essential that they have an exporting business strategy in place consisting of elements such as selecting appropriate export countries through market research, determining appropriate product modifications to suit the new market, selecting effective distribution channels and developing brand communication and marketing strategies.

However, New Zealand fashion designers do not usually develop an export strategy, especially in the initial stages of exporting. It is most common for fashion designers to be approached after an ANZFW show by a buyer or agent wanting to sell/represent their brand internationally and the designer agrees, excited that their brand is going international. This excitement and often speed of accepting an offer can cause problems. The lack of planning means that the designer may not have thoroughly researched that particular export market, if at all, and they are susceptible to signing contracts that are not favourable to their business.

Stretton recalls her first attempt to export, where she was confronted by an agent with different expectations than her own. After Fashion Week 2002, she was approached by an Irish agent wanting to represent her brand in Dublin. Stretton agreed, assuming that because the agent thought so, the Dublin market would be a good fit with her brand. However, she had problems with the agent who was difficult to contact and eventually told Stretton (2007) that, "I forgot to tell you, I've just had a baby. Sorry I didn't get back to you but I'm probably not going to be able to do justice to your collection" (p. 128). From this example, it is clear

that designers need to thoroughly research buyers or agents before entering negotiations with them. Designers should also determine what they want to get out of the deal with the buyer or agent and be firm with their negotiations of this to ensure that they receive a fair contract.

New Zealand designers usually become more export savvy after their first dealings with agents and buyers regardless of whether they are negative or positive experiences. Initially, from the interviews, it seems that the choice to use an agent to represent their work or to wholesale direct to retailers is a personal preference. Stretton and Wiren prefer to use agents as they then only need to directly communicate with one person, as opposed to a number of retailers, in a market. Provided that the agent is good at selling and promoting the brand, this can be a positive and easy way for a brand to export.

In contrast, Robertson prefers to directly communicate with retailers as this gives her more control over where her brand is being stocked and how it is being managed. However, deeper analysis reveals that it is possible that the only reason Robertson is able to wholesale directly to retailers is because she currently only exports to one market. Wiren and Stetton may not have any choice but to use agents due to the time it would take to directly communicate with the large volume of retailers that stock their brand internationally.

New Zealand fashion designers aspire to export to the Northern Hemisphere as this is where the epitome of designer fashion is showcased and judged. If a designer is accepted into the New York, Paris, Milan or even London Fashion Weeks, they are seen by New Zealanders to have “made it” in the global fashion world. This would align with the way most other New Zealand creative industries,

for example, music or film, are perceived; if they achieve international recognition, then they must be good and worthy of our acclamation.

The challenge for New Zealand designers is that to export to the Northern Hemisphere, they must cater for the seasonal change. The collection they have designed for the New Zealand/Australian market needs to be modified for the Northern Hemisphere as they operate in opposite seasons. This challenges a designer to become even more forward-looking and directional, and conduct deeper research into trends as they do not have a basis of already set trends to look to when designing. This is what happens in the New Zealand market where designers look to the current autumn/winter or spring/summer trends in the Northern Hemisphere to design for the upcoming autumn/winter or spring/summer seasons in the Southern Hemisphere.

This lack of set trends holds immense possibility for the international perception of New Zealand designers. By not following trends that have already been set, New Zealand designers have the chance to set trends of their own. If these trends are received well by international media, the international perception of the creativity and innovation of New Zealand designers as a whole will increase. This could have the flow on effect of more international agents/buyers attending ANZFW, designers gaining more international stockists and New Zealand designers being sought after by international media and celebrities.

Government and industry support

A vital factor for any business when preparing to export is researching the support available from government and industry bodies (Crick & Czinkota, 1995). In New

Zealand, any industry and government help is greatly welcomed by fashion designers. The industry does not provide a great deal of support to most designers, although the industry body FINZ (Fashion Industry New Zealand) is attempting to change this with the vision to support and provide information to designers about the New Zealand fashion industry.

Most of the interviewees do not think the information that FINZ currently provides is very valuable as it is broad and not always current. However, they mentioned that it could be useful if it was developed further. One such development could be in the form of increased seminars and workshops at all levels of business. This would provide guidance and information to designers, from writing a communications plan through to successfully exporting their brand. Other developments could include information booklets about different areas of the industry published and available online, networking and mentoring systems set up, and information on loans, grants and awards that are available for fashion designers.

NZTE provide some valuable and varied support for fashion designers; however, they are limited in the number of designers they can support due to financial constraints. NZTE currently provide grants, export advice and seminars (NZTE, 2008). Robertson has taken advantage of what NZTE offers, as she explains through the example of how she has been,

working through Trade & Enterprise with Derek [her NZTE mentor], I'm just doing a massive high impact course at the moment where we will hopefully by the end of October have our five year business plan finished and from that we will apply for an exporting grant. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

Unfortunately, her main problem with NZTE is that,

everyone who's involved with them are either engineers or builders. And there's not that many of us [creative types], there's one art lady but the rest are all engineers or builders or that way inclined. And they are just a little bit too far away from what I'm doing. So it's hard to sort of negotiate that much with them. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

As NZTE have identified fashion designers as a key export market, they could consider providing export courses specifically for fashion designers or for those in the creative industries. This would mean that the content could be tailored to the group so they can achieve maximum benefit from the course. It would also provide the participants with a valuable information and support network.

NZTE also select a small number of designers, typically four a year, to show in a New Zealand group show at Australian Fashion Week (AFW). Both the *Cybèle* and *Annah Stretton* labels have been selected for this, and both designers commented that it was a crucial branding exercise for the Australian market. Neither would have been able to afford to participate individually, and the contacts and media coverage they received was invaluable, both for entering the Australian market and for establishing themselves in the market during their second year of showing.

Brooks is currently focussed on being selected for the 2009 group show as she feels that her participation is vital to launch her brand in Australia. In 2007, Wiren was financially supported by NZTE to hold her first solo runway show at AFW, one of only two New Zealand designers to show in this year. In 2008, NZTE set up an on-site showroom showcasing thirteen New Zealand designers. Both Wiren

and Stretton participated in this and believed that it was a very successful NZTE initiative as they both secured buyers and media coverage from it.

From this, it is evident that NZTE are a vital part of the fashion industry. The majority of designers utilise NZTE services at some point of their export business, primarily at the beginning. The reason NZTE may only be used at the beginning of the designers export business is because NZTE primarily focus on support within the Australian market, which is the first export market for most New Zealand fashion designers. NZTE should be commended for successfully establishing a New Zealand designer fashion presence in the Australian market through yearly attendance of AFW. However, as designer fashion has been identified as a key export market, perhaps NZTE need to identify key export markets for fashion designers beyond Australia so their support can be extended and this success can be repeated in further markets.

Air New Zealand, the current major sponsor of Fashion Week in New Zealand, sponsor two yearly export awards, one for an established fashion exporter, and another for a developing fashion exporter. Both Wiren and Stretton have been awarded the *Air New Zealand Export Development Award*. This awards the designer \$15,000 towards international travel and research of export markets. Both designers considered this money invaluable in giving them the financial ability to thoroughly research their target export markets and expand their export business with a planned strategy. Wiren, the 2008 winner, describes her plan as,

to go to Tokyo to build on what we have there and the second phase is to go to New York to investigate things there, to meet up with some agents and things and have a look at what the market's like there, more of a research trip. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

It is evident that awards like this provide designers with a valuable opportunity to expand their business. However, there are few available in the fashion industry. Perhaps another development for FINZ could be to seek sponsorship for awards to develop promising fashion brands.

Breaking into new markets

Moore et al. (2000) state that when most fashion designers begin to export, they target countries with a close proximity to their domestic market. This is due to lowered freight costs, similar demographics and typically fewer entry barriers. It follows that Wiren describes Australia as,

the natural second market for New Zealand, businesses in general and definitely fashion because it's a lot bigger and it's close and it, in terms of entry, there's less entry barriers for exporting to Australia than there are to other countries...sizing and the currency is not too tricky for people and freight's not as horrendous as other places, and language. (Wiren, personal communication, October 14, 2008)

For these reasons, most New Zealand fashion designers begin exporting by breaking into the Australian market.

The most common way for a high-end designer fashion brand to break into the Australian market is through ANZFW. ANZFW attracts a lot of Australian buyers and agents who attend specifically to identify New Zealand talent to represent or sell in Australia. Designers are generally approached by these agents/buyers in the weeks following their show to negotiate a deal. Robertson decided to participate in ANZFW 2008 for the first time because she wants to start exporting. She considered showing directly at Melbourne Fashion Week but realised that it

would cost up to \$20,000, whereas ANZFW would only be about a quarter of that price. So Robertson,

thought we'd start with Fashion Week, introduce it back to New Zealand again, try and get some good media coverage from that and then hopefully that will set the ball rolling and bring in the dollars so we can head to Sydney next March. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

From this quote, it is evident that Robertson expects that the media coverage she will receive from Fashion Week will increase her profile and sales enough so that she can afford to participate in trade shows in Australia. She also hopes to secure Australian buyers from her participation at ANZFW, which the organisers “are pretty positive about” (personal communication, August 28, 2008).

New Zealand designers also break into the Australian market through Australia Fashion Week (AFW). All New Zealand designers who have participated at AFW to date have been supported by NZTE, as discussed earlier. As well as introducing New Zealand designers to the Australian market, AFW is also attended by New Zealand designers who are currently exporting to Australia. Similar to ANZFW, the designers consider AFW a vital tool to build their brand profile and communicate the identity of the brand to the Australian media and industry. Stretton gives an example of her experience of using AFW to boost her profile and sales in the Australian market,

After securing the NZTE package (which paid a percentage of the funding required to attend the event) I was accepted to present my collection at RAFW [Rosemount Australia Fashion Week] ... [in a] Ready to Wear Group Show. ... The women's wear buyers for mega-

store David Jones (who we had been targeting for a while) was in the audience and he was complimentary about the collection. He subsequently made an appointment to view the range and has decided to consider stocking it for Summer 2008, alongside other New Zealand designers Trelise Cooper and Sabatini – which was a hugely exciting achievement for our team. ... A new level of branding definitely occurred in the Australian marketplace. (Stretton, 2007, p. 139)

Being stocked alongside high-profile brands such as Trelise Cooper and Sabatini is valuable in communicating the high-end designer image that Stretton strives toward. These designers are two of New Zealand's top high-end designers and are both popular in the Australian market. Stretton's success at getting her product stocked with them can thus be predicted to have a positive effect on her brand image and popularity in the Australian market.

Beyond the Australian market, New Zealand designers are usually approached to export to international markets by interested retailers or agents who have seen the brand showcased at ANZFW. Once again, this demonstrates that New Zealand fashion designers do not follow the current export literature that emphasises the importance of having a solid, well researched export plan before exporting to a new market (Jeannet & Hennessey, 2004; Wigley & Moore, 2007). Instead of seeking out and choosing appropriate export markets for their brand, they are usually approached by the market. However, it is vital, even when approached by the market, for a business to conduct market research to ensure that the market is a suitable fit with the brand before agreeing to enter that market (Wigley et al., 2005).

Wiren is an example of a fashion brand that conducts extensive research and creates a business and communications plan before exporting to a new market.

This is because,

it's really important for me to have a strong solid foundation, and if a market's worth doing, it's worth doing well, we sort of invest in being there and doing PR there as well. A brand like *Cybèle*, the branding behind it is really important and that's the way that it will move forward. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

Wiren's quote highlights the importance of identifying an export market and creating a strategy to enter it. By focussing on entering one export market at a time, a designer can thoroughly research the market and invest in it by hiring a PR firm in the country, designing a detailed communications plan and concentrating on communicating the unique identity of the brand. The Japanese market is a good example of Wiren's research and investment in a market. Wiren was approached by a Japanese PR firm at her first show at RAFW in 2005:

they came to us and were interested and they put a proposal forward that they would like to represent us and we just kept in touch really because it wasn't really quite the right time to take on that sort of level of commitment. ... But we were in contact with them and [in 2006] we commissioned them to do a research project based on the *Cybèle* brand in Japan because they are there and understand it better than anyone. And we were just really impressed with the way they work. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

Thorough research and not entering an export market before the brand is ready come through as key points in this example. Wiren also demonstrates the importance of keeping in communication with contacts, even if they can not be of

immediate use. Utilising the services of a PR firm in the potential export market is also highlighted as a good research strategy as they can more accurately predict brand fit with the market, as they understand the market better than a PR firm in New Zealand would.

In 2007, Wiren decided to move forward with exporting the brand to Japan, using the PR firm as her main source of contacts and brand building. The Japanese market is now Wiren's "fastest growing market" (personal communication, October 14, 2008). This example highlights the importance of designers having a business plan, researching a market extensively and hiring a PR firm in that market. By doing so, designers are able to assess the feasibility of their brand in the market; whether the public will react favourably to their aesthetic and designs, and who their target consumer should be. They can work with the PR firm to create a communications strategy for the most effective way to enter the market, possibly by showing at the national Fashion Week or staging their own launch event.

The importance of extensive research cannot be stressed enough, as each market is different in terms of the aesthetics they like, ways to attract the media, laws and regulations and events. Hiring a PR firm in a new market before entry, or working with their New Zealand PR firm, can provide a valuable source of knowledge and contacts in these areas and, while success can never be guaranteed, provides a greater chance of success in a new market.

International communication strategies

Scholars also state that it is vital for a business to have a planned communications and branding strategy when entering a new market (Cateora & Graham, 2005; Jeannet & Hennessey, 2004; Wigley & Moore, 2007). Vrontis and Vronti (2004) suggest that this strategy should be a mix of a standardised format and a format that is adapted to the needs to each market. The majority of New Zealand fashion designers do not follow this format. Their communication and branding tactics are not usually planned or part of an overall strategy, but are opportunities that are taken when offered.

Wiren is the only fashion designer interviewed to have a strategic international communications approach. She considers that,

the most effective way to go about breaking into the market is to have good representation, preferably on the ground in those markets. We have sales and PR representation in both Australia and Japan, and then the Hong Kong connection is also someone that we know, who is not always based there but has a connection there so it is managed well by people who understand the brand, that's really important. I think that it's a really solid, sustainable way to build those relationships.
(personal communication, October 14, 2008)

These firms handle all of her PR, events and media communication as well as act as an intermediary with interested retailers wanting to stock the brand. It is clear that Wiren understands the value of her brand as she stresses the importance of the brand being managed by people who understand its identity, personality and vision, and who can communicate it effectively.

Wiren chooses to use local PR firms as opposed to handling the PR from New Zealand. This is because PR firms in each country have established contacts and knowledge of the industry, as well as access to opportunities that she cannot hope to have. She explains that,

I think that every market's different, but in general, the more contact you can have the better. And again it's the contact that's appropriate, it's not just any old thing. But having that support and the people on the ground with those contacts to help guide you, to help get you those opportunities and things is essential. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

From this, it can be expressed that the type of communication a brand uses is important. PR firms understand what type of communication works in their particular market, again demonstrating the advantages of hiring a PR firm in each export market.

All of Wiren's PR material that is created by her New Zealand PR firm is sent to her international PR firms who either use it as is, or adjust it to suit the market. In the case of Japan,

it will be translated and also because we are working opposite seasons we are doing a trans-seasonal collection, they get summer and we have winter so there's always some things that change a little bit about the way we talk about the collection. (personal communication, October 14, 2008)

Any marketing materials that Wiren's graphic designer produces are also sent to her international PR firms. While the majority of PR material is written in New Zealand, the international firms do have the autonomy to create their own PR

material around local fashion events that the *Cybèle* brand is part of, supporting Vrontis and Vronti's (2004) use of a planned communication strategy utilising both standardised and market specific material. Wiren's intention behind this is to keep the brand identity consistent across all markets by retaining an element of control over what is being said about the brand and to reduce costs, reflecting benefits presented in international PR literature (Bohdanowicz & Clamp, 1994; Lattimore et al., 2004; Vrontis & Vronti, 2004).

Through exporting trial and error, Stretton has started to become more strategic in her international communication and branding tactics. While she does not have a planned strategy, she has begun to determine what works and does not work for her brand. In 2007, Stretton showcased her upcoming collection in a private show in a Sydney hotel. She evaluated this event as a "great way of reaching my potential market and raising the profile of my brand" (Stretton, 2007, p. 142). This led her to consider if "the twenty thousand dollars it costs to attend an event such as RAFEW isn't better spent hiring hotel space, providing catering, and inviting the media and buyers to a private showing instead" (Stretton, 2007, p. 142).

However, a brand could only do this if they were established enough in a market to attract buyers and media to the event. Otherwise, they are better to participate in an organised Fashion Week, as the purpose of this is to attract buyers and media by showing established designers alongside emerging designers. It is apparent that Stretton feels as though the *Annah Stretton* brand has achieved this level of status in the Australian market, and the success of her private show would indeed demonstrate that it has.

Stretton also plans to open two own-brand stores in Sydney and Melbourne in 2010. The strategy behind this is to follow on from the success of her 30 own-brand stores in New Zealand. As her label is becoming well recognised and popular in the Australian market, and with her extensive experience at operating own-brand stores, Stretton has decided it will be worthwhile to open these two stores in Australia. The strategy is that they will increase her brand profile across the Australian market and she will be able to follow this with further stores.

Similar to their New Zealand communication tactics, New Zealand fashion designers do not use advertising in international markets even though many scholars state that it is an integral part of the communication and branding success of an international fashion brand (Kapferer, 2008; Moore et al., 2000). Moore et al. (2000) explain that this is to keep the brand identity consistent across markets. However, New Zealand designers attempt to do this through their PR efforts instead.

From this, it can be interpreted that the designers transfer their understanding of PR and advertising in the New Zealand market to other markets. However, this is not always an accurate assumption. Different markets respond better to different communication tactics, so what may work in the New Zealand market may not in another market, and vice versa. Once again, this highlights the importance of having a PR firm in all markets, as they understand what PR tactics will be most successful in their market.

New Zealand designers use a limited range of international PR and branding tactics. This may be because of the assumption that the only PR tactics that exist are those that they use, or have heard about, in New Zealand. Thus, the main

tactics used are participation in national Fashion Weeks and NZTE initiatives. Other PR tactics sometimes include hosting their own show, however this is uncommon as the designer is not always readily available to oversee the show. It is also a rare tactic for New Zealand designers to open own-brand stores as Stretton is planning to do, even though literature states that this is a crucial tactic in promoting the brand (Moore et al., 2000). This may be because New Zealand designers rarely have an own-brand store in New Zealand and thus do not have the knowledge to consider opening one internationally.

It is apparent from the limited tactics they use that New Zealand designers need to consider using a more diverse range of international communication tactics to raise the profile of their brand. Again, this highlights the need to have on-the-ground PR representation to conceive and coordinate these tactics. Celebrities are more available and held in higher regard internationally so a strategy to identify and recruit celebrities to endorse the brand would increase the profile of the brand. Depending on the prominence of the celebrity, this could translate to media attention in more than one market. Participating in cause-related activities is another tactic that could be used in international markets. While this may be harder to do than in New Zealand (as New Zealand has few celebrities and thus fashion designers are elevated to that status), designers should still be able to identify causes that they can support. For example Stretton and Wren, who both design t-shirts for the Breast Cancer Research Trust in New Zealand, could work with its Australian counterpart to do something similar.

Robertson and Brooks, who have only recently begun exporting, are unsure about the international communication strategies they will use. Neither have an export

strategy or communications plan, although Robertson is in the process of writing one. Brooks knows that she wants to show at AFW if she can get an NZTE grant to do so; however, this is the extent of her communication planning thus far. It is apparent that she does not understand how she will communicate effectively with her international publics as suggested through her statement, “first I need to find an agent or a distributor and then I guess I really would need a PR agent over there. Well the agent might have a showroom or something” (personal communication, October 13, 2008). Robertson, who is further along with her research into exporting than Brooks is, also appears unsure, commenting that,

I’m not really sure to be quite honest. ... Probably over there [international markets] it will be whoever we use as our agent and seller will probably end up being our PR person as well because that will be the first point of call for the media anyway. (personal communication, August 28, 2008)

It is disconcerting that both these emerging designers have already begun to export, Robertson to Ireland, and Brooks to Australia, without understanding how to communicate to these markets, let alone having a planned communications strategy in place. These examples highlight the need to educate these designers that in order to be successful in a new market, they need to thoroughly research it and have a planned communications strategy in place before entering it. Again, hiring a PR firm in the market would be beneficial as the agent or seller may not be able to communicate the brand as effectively or accurately as a PR firm that specialises in this.

These educators could be NZTE, FINZ or tertiary fashion institutions. Mentors from within the industry would also be useful in providing experience, advice and

contacts; this could be facilitated by FINZ. The New Zealand PR firms that the designers employ should also offer this advice. In fact, they should be working with the designer to create the communications plan or to find a good PR firm in the new market who can do so.

Exporting and the New Zealand identity

Known as the country-of-origin effect, the country where a product is designed, manufactured or distributed from has an effect on the way that the product is perceived. Thus, the identity of the country has an influencing effect on the identity of the products and brands that it exports (Cateora & Graham, 2005). All the interviewees agree that the New Zealand identity has positive connotations for their brand. New Zealand is “seen as a little bit different, innovative, can deliver, ... fresh, green, innovative [and] a little bit edgy” (Hope, personal communication, August 26, 2008). It also has a positive reputation for producing reliable, quality exports. This reputation is important for designers as it is what initially attracts international buyers to ANZFW to view New Zealand fashion as a whole.

The designers have differing opinions about drawing from the New Zealand identity to enhance their international brand image. Stretton is the only designer who actively promotes her label as being from New Zealand. She does this because “the general retail public over there [Australia] are responding well to it. It just works” (Hope, personal communication, August 26, 2008). Hope explains that so long as they continue to respond well to it, Stretton will continue to promote herself as such.

In contrast, the other designers do not actively use, or plan to use, the New Zealand identity to promote their brand. Wiren, who exports to four countries, explains that,

it's not something I push as the identity of the brand because...I feel like we live in a global world, its a global market and...I think that inherently there's always some inherent New Zealand factor about everything because I am from New Zealand, but I don't feel the need to trade on, to trade heavily anyway, on the New Zealand identity.
(personal communication, October 14, 2008)

Robertson and Brooks, who have only begun exporting, both feel that the positive connotations that New Zealand has will be beneficial to their image, but do not feel as though they need to actively promote this. This may be because these designers do not want "to be put in a box, especially in terms of a look" (Wiren, personal communication, October 14, 2008). Instead, they want to be recognised for their own unique identity and designs. This feeling could stem from the fact that none of the interviewees fit the commonly portrayed international identity of New Zealand fashion designers. This identity is of New Zealand fashion designers as dark, brooding and intellectual, however this is not representative of many New Zealand designers and the interviewees do not want their brands to be perceived as such.

The designers interviewed need to understand that even if their brand is not entirely representative of the New Zealand national or designer fashion identity, they can still draw on selected connotations that are to promote their brand. It is difficult enough for a designer to establish themselves in a new market; if they have the opportunity to draw on an already established and positive brand image,

such as the New Zealand identity, to position their brand, they should take advantage of it.

In saying this, while it can be valuable for the designers to draw from the New Zealand identity, it is important for these designers to also be recognised for their own unique identity, and not be attributed qualities from the New Zealand national or fashion identity that do not fit with their brand identity. This is an important concept for them to understand because an association with the New Zealand identity will give their brand a particular meaning. If this meaning does not align with the designer's brand identity, it can actually be detrimental to the designer's brand image. This is because consumers and buyers may be disillusioned when they experience the product or brand and it does not correspond with the image that the media has portrayed (Lattimore et al., 2004).

None of the designers think that being a New Zealand designer is a point of differentiation for their brands, especially in the Australian market. They consider that the New Zealand identity may transfer positive attributes to their brand image, but in terms of differentiation "it probably wouldn't be because there are heaps of New Zealand designers already over there so it wouldn't be anything different" (Brooks, personal communication, October 13, 2008). This is an interesting belief because it appears contradictory. The New Zealand image is about being innovative, different, creative and edgy, and these connotations in themselves give a brand a point of differentiation.

It could be interpreted that the designers do not understand that just being a New Zealand designer gives them unique qualities, regardless of whether the market has "heaps of New Zealand designers already over there" (Brooks, personal

communication, October 13, 2008). A New Zealand designer strives to create a point of difference from these designers within the New Zealand market. It follows that even when competing with the same designers in another market, they will still have that same point of differentiation.

It is interesting, and again quite contradictory, that while these designers do not want to be labelled as a “New Zealand fashion designer”, they still participate in NZTE sponsored events. By participating in these events, they are being portrayed to the international market as a New Zealand designer as the purpose of these NZTE initiatives is to promote New Zealand talent. The designer’s brand is effectively labelled as a New Zealand brand and thus the connotations of the New Zealand identity are transferred to their brand image.

If a designer enters a new market through an NZTE initiative, they are initially promoted to that market as a New Zealand fashion designer. Once an audience perceives a brand to have certain qualities, they are difficult to change (Lattimore et al., 2004). It follows that if a designer from New Zealand does not want to be perceived as a New Zealand designer, they need to avoid participating in NZTE initiatives, especially when first entering a market.

However, as designers rely so heavily on NZTE to help them export, especially to the Australian market, avoiding participation in NZTE initiatives could be detrimental to their export success. Instead, designers need to understand that their participation will label them as a “New Zealand fashion designer” and that they should embrace this by actively promoting the New Zealand attributes that they want to be associated with their brand and avoiding those that they do not. Being a New Zealand designer involved in an NZTE initiative acts an initial point of

differentiation in a market and as such, attracts media attention. Designers should take advantage of this media to also push their own unique brand identity so the media can portray them as having both positive New Zealand attributes, and their own set of unique attributes.

Concluding remarks

This chapter first discussed how New Zealand fashion designers measure the success of their business by media, sales, feedback and least importantly, the bottom line. After achieving success and reaching market saturation in the New Zealand market, New Zealand designers begin exporting their brand. As such, the chapter moved on to examine the strategies that the designers use to export their brand and to effectively communicate their brand to international markets.

Following on from this was an analysis of how the New Zealand national identity has an effect on the communication strategies and international brand perception of the designers' brands.

The next chapter will draw from this chapter and the previous chapter to summarise the conclusions of the research study and provide recommendations for New Zealand fashion designers, the creative industries, creative industry bodies and NZTE.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion and recommendations

In the previous two chapters, the four cases that comprise this research study have been analysed to discover how New Zealand fashion designers construct and communicate a unique and fluid identity. This chapter will conclude the research study by drawing from the analysis to summarise the research and locate it within the wider context of the creative industries. It will provide recommendations for the creative industries, industry bodies and NZTE, and offer suggestions for future research in public relations and the creative industries.

Summary and recommendations

Constructing and communicating a unique and fluid identity

This research study investigated how New Zealand fashion designers construct and communicate a unique and fluid identity. The study first focussed on how New Zealand fashion designers build and maintain a unique brand identity in the New Zealand market through their use of public relations and communication strategies. After a fashion brand finds success in the domestic market, fashion designers typically begin to export the brand. As such, the study moved on to how New Zealand designers communicate their brand identity to export markets. This also included an analysis of how the New Zealand national identity has an effect on the communication of their identity in international markets.

Whilst the findings from this in-depth study of New Zealand fashion designers can only be accurately generalised within the context of New Zealand designer fashion (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000), there are many elements that contribute to an understanding of the creative industries in New Zealand as a whole.

It was found that the construction and communication of a unique identity is essential for the success of an organisation in the designer fashion industry. Similar to the designer fashion industry, creative industries are continuously changing and evolving (Flew, 2005). As such, they too rely on a unique and fluid identity to sell their product or service.

From the research, it was evident that the most essential element to the successful construction and communication of a unique and fluid identity is the implementation of a detailed communications plan. The majority of fashion designers did not use a communications plan, and it was clear that if they had done so, they would have been more successful in the communication of their identity with their publics. The one designer that did have a communications plan from the beginning of her business can be regarded as having the most successful brand communication of the four. This again highlights that a communications plan is essential to achieve success in the designer fashion industry.

The most important recommendation for creative organisations is the construction and implementation of an in-depth communications plan. This will allow the organisation to strategically construct an identity that is unique and targeted to the organisation's publics. This should ideally be created at the outset of the business as once publics have formed their perception of the organisation and/or brand, it is difficult to change (Lattimore et al., 2004).

It was demonstrated in the research that designer fashion organisations who used the services of PR firms instead of advertising achieved more effective promotion of their brand identity. The one designer who had used a PR firm from the outset of her business did not experience any issues with the promotion of her brand. In contrast, the other three designers had negative experiences through advertising and wished that they had hired a PR firm earlier. As such, it is recommended that creative organisations hire a PR firm as soon as they can afford to. This can be regarded as a significant investment in the identity and branding of the organisation as the PR firm can help to write the communications plan as described above, and to communicate it to the appropriate publics.

It is also recommended that creative organisations hire a PR firm that specialises in creative industries. It was evident in the research that this is more beneficial to the organisation as these PR firms have the necessary contacts within the industry and can provide industry specific PR services. This study also demonstrated that when hiring a PR firm, it is important to ensure that they understand the organisation's identity, personality and vision, and can manage it effectively.

Industry bodies

Industry organisations have the ability to play a significant role in the creation and success of a creative business. However, this research study demonstrated that industry bodies do not always adequately provide for the needs of these businesses at different stages of growth. Therefore, the main recommendations that can be made to industry bodies are to develop the information and support they provide to the industry, and develop the methods of communicating this information. For example, creative industry organisations could provide:

- Up-to-date information about the industry, including government policies, industry issues, trading regulations and industry events.
- Business development information such as creating a communications plan, building a website and financial management. This could be available on their website or as information booklets.
- A list of further references or websites for more advice within the industry.
- The development or increase of seminars, workshops and conferences at all levels of growth to train/inform creative organisations.
- The development of mentoring and/or networking services.

Another recommendation to industry bodies is to provide information on industry awards available and/or to develop further industry awards. This recommendation is derived from the research that demonstrated that industry awards are invaluable for growing a business, especially into export markets. To increase the number of industry awards available, industry bodies could actively seek sponsorship for awards and provide high-profile events at which they can be awarded.

Communication and export

As the New Zealand consumer market is small, it tends to become saturated quickly. As such, once a fashion designer becomes successful in the New Zealand market, they have almost saturated the market. Following this, the next step is to export. From the research, it was evident that fashion designers do not approach exporting in the most constructive way. Designer fashion organisations tend to enter markets after being approached by them as opposed to proactively identifying quality export markets.

As such, a recommendation for creative organisations is to identify potential export markets and conduct in-depth research into these markets to determine if they are appropriate for the brand. Once an export market has been deemed suitable, an in-depth communications plan should be developed. From the research, it was clear that this should be done with the help of a PR firm in that country as they have a better understanding of what works for that market.

The New Zealand identity is an asset to the international identity of a creative organisation. The New Zealand connotations of innovation, creativity, a little bit edgy and reliable exporters, are characteristics that the majority of fashion designers and creative organisations want to be associated with their identity. As such, it is recommended that creative organisations should actively draw on the New Zealand identity to promote their brand internationally. However, they need to be aware that to create a unique identity, they also need to promote their differentiating characteristics alongside those of the New Zealand identity.

NZTE

NZTE have identified the creative industries as a key sector to the export development of New Zealand (NZTE, 2006b). This thesis also shows that they are a significant contributor to the export success of creative industries and, in particular, the designer fashion industry. However, there are some areas that this research has indicated could improve NZTE's service to the creative industries.

The first is that the courses that NZTE provide are not tailored for creative businesses. It was evident that the designers felt as though they were not receiving maximum benefit from attending NZTE workshops, as their needs were

significantly different from the needs of the traditional industries that made up 90% of the course participants. To address this, NZTE could consider providing export courses specifically for organisations in the creative industries. This would mean that the content can be tailored to the group so they can achieve maximum success from the course. It would also provide the participants with a valuable information and support network within their industry.

Secondly, it was demonstrated by the designer fashion industry that NZTE have successfully built a New Zealand export presence in Australia. However, as the creative industries have been identified as a way to positively showcase the New Zealand identity internationally (de Bruin, 2005), this success needs to be replicated in further markets. As such, it is recommended that NZTE need to identify key export markets for creative industries beyond Australia, and provide opportunities for creative organisations to successfully export to these markets.

Contributions to research

As an in-depth scholarly investigation of public relations in the New Zealand creative and designer fashion industries, this thesis provides a valuable contribution to both New Zealand and international scholarly research.

There is little scholarly literature on the New Zealand creative industries, and none on the New Zealand designer fashion industry. What little there is does not focus on the public relations or communication strategies of identity management. As such, this thesis applies international public relations literature to a New Zealand context and thus develops research in this area. The scholarly research that has been done on New Zealand creative industries tends to focus on their

contribution to the New Zealand international identity. This thesis developed and advanced this literature by researching the opposite: how the New Zealand identity contributes to the international identity of a creative organisation.

The creative industries are a developing field of international scholarly research. However, there is still little research that has been published on public relations in the creative industries. As such, this thesis advances literature in the areas of identity and image management of brands in the creative industries. In particular, it contributes to literature on fashion public relations. This field of research is new and relatively underdeveloped, as is evident from a lack of significant scholarly research in this area. This thesis has developed this area by investigating how designer fashion organisations use public relations to construct and communicate a unique identity. As such, it provides a detailed discussion on identity management in this industry.

Currently, scholarly research in the field of international fashion public relations focuses on international retailing in the designer fashion industry. This thesis goes beyond this to provide an example of brand identity construction and management in export markets. It also contributes to research on the export of creative organisations and small to medium enterprises by investigating how identity construction and management is vital for export success.

Future research

Due to the broad scope of this research study, there are many possibilities for future research based in this area. As such, this section only details the research

that would be most beneficial to the designer fashion industry and the creative industries in the near future.

This thesis identifies a broad scope of the strategies (or lack thereof) used by New Zealand fashion designers to construct and communicate a unique and fluid domestic and export identity. It was evident that the use of a fashion PR firm is vital for the success of a fashion brand. Future research could focus specifically on the role of the fashion public relations firm in the construction and communication of brand identity. This would work towards filling the gap in scholarly literature on the New Zealand fashion PR industry and be beneficial to the knowledge and advancement of industry practitioners.

Fashion Industry New Zealand (FINZ) has the potential to be a key contributor to the growth and development of the New Zealand fashion industry. As the Board is comprised of working industry experts, it is not necessarily feasible for members of the Board to undertake a significant research study. As such, a scholarly or commissioned in-depth investigation into the capabilities and future potential of this organisation would be extremely beneficial to the organisation and the fashion industry as a whole.

This study highlights that the barriers New Zealand fashion designers and other creative industries face when exporting are not only communication focused. Further research into overcoming these other barriers would be beneficial to the exporting advancement and success of the creative industries.

While this research study focused on the designer fashion industry, similar research focused on other creative industries could be undertaken. As the creative

industries have been identified as a key sector for the economic growth and global positioning of New Zealand (de Bruin, 2005), further scholarly research into the successful public relations and communication strategies used by different creative sectors would be beneficial to both the New Zealand Government and the industry.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Transcription - Tony Hope

What aspects of the Annah Stretton brand and designs differentiate it from all other New Zealand fashion designers?

Interesting question isn't it? And I think the challenge is to almost be careful not to over niche yourself. I think she's got a distinctive handwriting and with her conscious effort to direct the brand at the moment it's been quite interesting that she's reflected on herself and I think the *Annah S* brand will still remain quite feminine and flouncy but it's moving away from being over embellished. Now that doesn't answer the question, but we'll get to that. And the *Annah Stretton* brand seems to be a little bit more cleaner, the lines more sophisticated, and more about, there's still colour and there's still form, but it's not as frou frou I guess, and she's definitely leaving that behind. So its interesting in terms of differentiation, she's making a conscious effort to move away from the absolute niche that she shared with the likes of Trelise, colours, layers, texture, you know there was quite a coiffure of sensory overload.

And a lot of different fabrics put together.

Right and I think she does have a history of that in terms of trade, and whereas now, she's almost considering making sure that she finds the designer label so that she feels comfortable being called as designer. She's differentiated the two, *Annah S* and *Annah Stretton* I think, quite interestingly...

As a designer label and a retail label?

Exactly. So she should end up being, hopefully, and this is where it's interesting, because as it comes through, she still gets the girls going "*Annah S* or *Annah Stretton*" you know, so it's not that well differentiated, even internally and it was her idea. So I think, if I cut to the chase and answer it, I would suggest that there's a strength of character to her designs and that not following trends, not necessarily

wanting to conform to them or current styling and patterns, but more about individual statement, and we believe that it's targeted women who have already made it, the Stretton brand, you know they don't need permission, they'll go to it, they will be confident, they will make decisions, they will purchase it, and spend well. The *Annah S* brand, is a little bit different. That's a women in transition, in her early 30's, wanting to stand out, wanting, but not quite confident enough yet and our girls can sell really well to them. So it is a brand that stimulates questions, and emotions for the woman.

Do you think there still does need to be some element of fashion in there? Like current fashion, current trends?

Absolutely and some products we've put out too early, so we travel we've seen something, we like the concept...

You're ahead of the times.

We've put it out, it doesn't sell and it's simply been too early, so yeah that definitely proves that you can be outside the square too much.

With a product that obviously needs to change every season, is it difficult to make sure that the image of the brand (the way that people see it) is the same as the core identity of the brand (the way that the company sees it)?

Yeah. I think people are looking for fresh product and therefore you do need to have a story, a new story, and that's sometimes just the marketing edge because we're also conscious that the woman likes to be able to build on previous purchases so we have in mind the fact that we used certain colours in the previous season, and certain blocks, and we know they fit well, so the block isn't varied to much because you've got a winning shape and a winning fit, her pants were well well recognised as being a great fit particularly for tall women, that was simply because we tested them on Annah who's a taller, long legged woman. But at the same time, people are looking for fresh, and women thankfully continually buy and react to the new season's product don't they. So you still have to have that handwriting I call it, running through, and I just think that underpins who she is, and if she is generating that fashion, it almost happens subconsciously. So the

story that we're doing for this Fashion Week it still has that handwriting but, because it's new and fresh, and because it's Stretton, it's actually challenging the box that she would normally sit in. So I can counter what I've just said by that current example. So really, I think that being an entrepreneur and being a vertical company and there's a great excitement and a great risk happening at the same time because she can always head where she likes, but I think the risk of that is that you've got to always be careful that you aren't confusing your client base. What looked great on them last season, what they felt comfortable wearing, and they just got their head round, suddenly you go way left of that or way right of that, they go, "oh this is not longer for me", and they might not return. So it's a double edge sword with Annah, yeah definitely.

What was the motivation to engage the help of Brian Richards?

Focus.

So your branding?

Focus. As simple as that. Too many ideas, too much energy, too much spread, as I think if we want the label to mature, and to be able to, particularly if we're going to invest in advertising and marketing, as if we say, look if we feel we are great and we've got a great product, we've got to have a story to tell. And in the past, over two of three seasons, that story would've been very different by concept, by mood, by emotion, by motivation, by whatever Annah felt like doing. Whereas, to maximise our investment of marketing, and to maximise potential growth, we really wanted, I really wanted, and Annah and Brian's have...Brian's involvement is helping Annah simply say look, let's have a great story, take the umbrella brand, *Annah Stretton*, because it is more than clothing, and let's get it tight, let's get it deep, narrow and clean. And then we can hammer it home, hammer it home, hammer it home. And then we will be able to keep the followers and devotees and they will stick with you. So really it's about focus.

So all of the fashion shows that you do need to be innovative and creative, and it is something that the brand is quite known for, yet at the same time reflect the core aspects of the brand every time.

Yeah.

How is it ensured that it will do both?

I don't know that we always have. The last one we did for Australian Fashion Week, it got good reviews, but I thought it was boring as bat shit. There was no story, really. It had a name and there was enough there to market, "Don't Take your Love to Town", but it got good reviews, and if your selling or wanting to establish yourself in a new market, Australia, which is not new to us but we want to re-establish and grow there, the media and the reviews and the general thought of the people in the trade needs to support you. So if you go out and do a frivolous show that entertains, but you haven't got substance and a clean line, or a full story of wearable, sellable clothes, you're not going to sell. So I think it achieved our goal but the show itself creatively, and getting involved in it for Annah and I, was as boring as hell. So and the year before at Fashion Week, "Taming Tiger Lily", that was a real lip service to having a spectacle and it flopped in my opinion, because we didn't go all out. You've either got to do one, or the other. And if your one, you take the risk of not being taken seriously, and if you are clean and don't embellish it with too many bells and whistles, then people almost start to think, oh it just a common theme we're expecting.

And the risk of not getting as much media attention?

But I'm ok. I think its time to move on, and again we're working now with a...Chris, PR, not just PR but also a stylist, and that's simply again to tie Annah down. Not because she needs inspiration, she's full of inspiration and ideas, but to tie her down, to par it down and to get it clean. So I just think its time for the label to grow up. And part of that is its ready to be recognised for what it can be, and what it is, a great label and a strong designing house. Whereas, earlier days, we had to shout, we had to be the squeaky wheel, we had to be outside the square to get attention, "who's Annah Stretton?", "Oh she's that girl with all those mall stores, mall fodder", and maybe we were, but now, there's a good maturity, there's a good sophistication, and there's a label that can stand as a designer label. So hence those core aspects are more important. So don't get too excited for Fashion Week this year.

How many fashion shows/events does the brand participate in a year?

Formal shows, probably two, Australian Fashion Week and New Zealand Fashion Week. Then informally with different groups, probably about 20 or 30. We will get an invitation to be part of the North Shore Hospice Fashion Extravaganza to raise funds and awareness or whatever, so I would probably list those as informal. But we really have just focussed on those two.

The brand is often partnered with sponsors at major fashion events. When establishing the brand, was this part of the strategic plan to create brand recognition?

I think it was. But it pays the bills for Annah. And I think it's more them recognising our brand, so our partners this year for example, in terms of accounting firms, banks, BMW, whatever, they see that Annah is a marketable opportunity for them to reward their client base. So in fact I think it's the reverse, rather than us using strategic partners to build our brand, they see us as a strategic opportunity to build their own brand, or to partner at least. I don't think BMW needs us, but they are really enthusiastic about bringing along 30 key clients, I presume mostly female, to say "hey thanks for buying BMW, come and have a neat day and a fashion girly day, and *Annah Stretton's* the show you'll be going to". So it's almost flipped. In the future, yeah probably might be the other way around, but you know, lets not kid ourselves. New Zealand Fashion Week is not that strategically important for a brand. It is a trade show. It's a trade show end of story. So you go there to sell to those in the trade. So if Liberty from London is there, their buyers there, they don't give a damn who sponsored them, they want great product. So that's, you've got to remember the focus of the show.

Does Annah ever feel constrained or limited in what she can design because of the identity of the brand?

I think she's always had that constraint, but she hasn't been frustrated by it because we're in the business of fashion which means making money which means paying bills. So the underpinning questions that always filters every design, is will this sell. Is this our girls' type of product. Hang it up in Tauranga,

will it sell? Hang it up in Queenstown, will it sell? Will it go well as an export garment? So obviously she's got to be flirtatious and creative, but you've got to make money to keep an operation like this going, so she's always been realistic.

And I suppose she gets her chance to express that sort of side of herself through the WOW shows and stuff like that?

Correct.

So she has other ways to express that real creativity, with clothes and fashion?

Correct, and I think the magazines are the outlet now in terms of artistic.

Where are the garments manufactured?

In New Zealand. Predominately in the North Island. Probably about 10-15% is done here and then the rest is contracted out to a range of small, medium, and large contractors.

Do you think the fact that it is produced in New Zealand as opposed to internationally, for example, China or Thailand, has a positive effect on the image of your brand?

It doesn't hurt. But I don't know if we sell them a broader product from offshore, that it would impact negatively. Trelise Coopers product is predominately made offshore but it's still seen as exclusive and elitist and worthy of \$450 a blouse. So I don't predict it would be, but we're proud of it and we like it and we kind of like the positive image for us, you know the positive feel it has for us and our team. So it just works with who we are and what we want to be.

So it was quite a deliberate decision then for you to keep your manufacturing here as opposed to going offshore where it's cheaper?

I think it suits our vertical nature. If for example we go to North America and we get a substantive order through large chains, it may well be a lot more viable economically viable for us to make in Asia and ship straight across simply because of constraints or opportunities in export versus cost versus flow versus

everything. So it's just the environment and who we create it, the company, to be. So our vertical nature, New Zealand based product primarily in terms of retail and Australia, that's our core business, and though we've got exposure throughout the world, it works, it's controllable, and it's a positive framework to come from. But it's not a philosophical determination. We don't say this must continue to be made in New Zealand.

Do you think that possibly as the brand grown internationally, you may start manufacturing offshore just because of the sheer quantities needed?

If the logistics and the economics support that, yes. Definitely.

I notice that you use the PR firm Mint Condition with Chris Lorimer. How long have you been using a PR firm for?

About six months.

And so you didn't use a PR firm even intermittently before then?

Not really, no.

So PR was done in house?

Pretty much.

Did you have a designated PR or marketing person?

Annah and I were it.

So the motivation for you to engage the PR firm was for focus again?

Absolutely. Consistent message as well, and realistically, Chris, and anyone in PR, it's what they do. And they have connections that we would never presume to be able to make. Its just like us and someone says "oh you know I'm thinking about a fabric to make a dress out of", well you know we can supply them 10,000 different fabrics because its what we do, not because we're particularly better, its just what we do. The same with Chris you know, everyday he's talking, thinking, breathing, living, growing with the fashionista and also with the generation. He's

younger, he's cool, and a lot of the writers, a lot of the people, you know, that's who they circulate with and spend time with so it just makes sense to.

So did you choose him because he was a stylist as well? What was the motivation to choose him in particular?

Good questions. I think what was interesting was... I don't think initially he would want to go with us. He wasn't sure what we were which in itself was an interesting message in terms of our branding. And it's only since Annah approached him and they have been working together and he's got an understanding of what Stretton can be, that he's been enthusiastic and open to working with Annah. Also her efficiencies and her ability to multitask and push things through and come back and feed him and feed off him, that the relationship's really quite a positive one.

And the fact that he's a stylist was a bonus? Or was it something that initially attracted you to him?

Yeah two for the price of one. Yeah he's good at what he does to. And I think he's a cleaner thinker in terms of fashion and Annah's very messy and erratic so again it was that focus opportunity.

Complimentary?

Yup, exactly. Yin and yang.

So do you prefer him to deal with the media?

Yes.

So you generally avoid dealing with it in house?

If were paying someone to do it, let them do it. And again it's consistent, there's a consistent point of contacts, consistent message and consistent accountability.

Fair enough. What public relations and marketing strategies do you use in New Zealand? Do you have any specific strategies?

Probably an on-hold question. There's a little bit of a hiatus there, simply because Annah's working with Brian, and until they clarify what the brand and the message is going to be, we're a little bit reluctant. It's easy enough for us to get some exposure however through what we're doing, and Annah's causes, and her actions and her involvement as a representative of fashion in New Zealand, as a mentor and all those sorts of things. So it's happening by course, it's happening as a matter of course because of her high involvement. She's on television fortnightly making business statements. And we have space available to us in our own magazines. So visually it's come about there as well. But in terms of a planned proactive program, it's really on hold.

You mentioned before about the possibility of actually advertising and that sort of stuff as well. So that's something that you can foresee yourself doing?

I think so, but again until we know what our tune is, don't start singing the song.

Do you know what sort of magazines or whether it will be billboards you would focus on advertising?

Not until the story's complete. I think it would be silly to predict.

A lot of it would depend on your target market.

Exactly. And the opportunities at the time. Magazines that are here today may not be here in six months.

That's true, you're quite lucky that you have your magazine here that you can advertise in.

Yeah sure, you've got to be a little bit careful there but yeah.

Do you know of celebrities who wear the brand? If so, what impact has this had on the brand in New Zealand and internationally?

Yes. I don't know about international so much, it's possible. But Annah's relationships extend in business and marketing and the philanthropic work means that she's always working with a lot of the high profile... media personalities. I

don't think we've got famous people do we? But so, it's sometimes, rather most personalities have worn our product at an event or in a photo shoot or whatever, but we don't have an active programme of seeking them for placement.

And you think this has a positive impact on you brand?

I think we see it as a positive opportunity to support the mutual relationship that we have with that person. So Amanda Miller, 60 Minutes reporter, she was on last night and did a good piece, we have a relationship with Amanda you know, she started a new business which Annah and her work together on, she's got an opinion as a writer and someone in the media in our magazine, gives her feedback. So if she's going somewhere and wants a garment to look great in, well we'll give her a lend garment or a freebie and its just as much not PR for the night and the product, as it's a balance of also supporting the relationship.

What factors are used to measure the successfulness of the brand? The bottom line?

Yes.

Is that all?

No. I think recognition in terms of an acceptance, I guess into the fashionista. If you ask anyone to list who's the most influential, you'll consistently get four or five names. But for Annah, it would be nice I guess for us to be included in at least the top ten. And Annah's influence. And I think that's a goal for us, and a measure. It's an emotional thing, and not tangible, but I think it will signify that the transition from just being a retailer to a fashion design label, and it's a measure, it's definitely a measure. Her involvement in different books that are around or promotional or retrospective to New Zealand fashion, if, that Annah's been invited, then you know she's had a strong influence. We know that she has, we employ a lot of people, pay a lot of wages, we put out a lot of product in New Zealand. There are a lot of women wearing what we produce. If you Google Annah Stretton, you know, there is a big list of references, so she's very influential and has made a difference, not just in terms of retail, not just in terms of fashion, but also in terms of contribution to business and so on and so forth. So

in that measure, an intrinsic emotional non intangible measure, its there, you can't help but listen and respond to that. I see she's got in the worst dressed in the Metro for her red hair which she hasn't had for months and months... years. But you see, there's a double negative. She's being recognised as someone important enough to include, in this occasion she listed as the worst dressed with her hair, so it's a signal isn't it of success. I'm not there, your not there, but Annah is. But the bottom line is turnover and profit. We're investing in branding and PR with people, with Mint Condition and BR Richards, not because we want to feel good, we want to make more money and be profitable and return that back to the company, return that back to our people.

In what countries do you export the brand to?

Primarily Australia. Europe there's a smattering there. Mid Asia which come from random requests, they pay upfront and get a bulk order from us as a wholesale. And Europe is mainly Ireland, a little bit in England and some in the European countries. I'd have to clarify. But the predominate export for us remains Australia.

And that's approximately 80 stores?

Correct. And that's changing all the time in terms of a new sales focus and we are taking a hard line because they are not great payers. Well sorry, many are, but many aren't. So is it worth really tying up our product for such a long period of time with no payment? We might be better to hold it here and sell through because we run out of product here at our retail. Are we better to get full retail New Zealand dollars instead of waiting many many months for wholesale? But I think North America would be our next goal.

Does Chris Lorimer handle your PR over in Australia?

Yes. And that's deliberate again in terms of his relationships extend over there.

And so he will deal with your PR when breaking into the American market and within Europe and Asia?

Ah no. I think the strength of Chris is his relationships and his standing in the community. And he has got no standing in America. So it may well be up to the person who is acting as our agent over there, and has relationships with someone who is trusted.

Would you consider employing a PR firm over there to deal with you PR?

I think that the agent will. We've got something working quietly in the background. Definite.

So how was it that the company broke into these markets? So Australia was...

Fashion Week. I think early Fashion Week's probably answers the questions to all her opportunities. We found a distributor who was working in Europe so therefore that carries the European contact. And we found, someone approached us and wanted to sell for us in Australia, we had a couple of false starts but we eventually found someone who we trusted and worked solely with our product, and there were good sales too. So one person could make a good living off our product. But it...yeah, Fashion Week. It's just a credible moment or a focus.

What percentage of total sales do these markets make up?

I would think export would be about 20%.

Do you think it will continue at about this number or would you like to grow it?

I would like to see it grow.

Do you have a target figure?

I think 30% would be great.

Does Annah identify herself as a "New Zealand fashion designer"?

Yes.

So does she use this label to market the brand internationally, like in Australia does she market the brand as New Zealand?

Yes.

Why does she do that?

I don't know how much longer it will last, but we're seen as a little bit different, innovative, can deliver, the general retail public over there are responding well to it. It just works I guess. Its like our wine, it's our clean green image, it just works.

So you think that innovativeness, that idea is an inherently New Zealand association?

I think so, yeah. I don't know if we've deliberately driven it, it just seems to exist. For as long as it does, let's use it. I don't think we have to introduce ourselves as "Annah Stretton, New Zealand label", we're just "Annah Stretton", we've got someone selling and proactively approaching with a suitcase full of great product, "have you got five minutes?" So there is some cold calling out there. I think her prominence and her retail base here gives her credibility just as much as being in New Zealand itself. If someone says "look I'm selling and I can deliver", "oh yeah sure", "well I've got 30 stores throughout New Zealand so I've got a production base that can have the capability of meeting demand you create." There's credibility there. So I think just as much as being a New Zealand designer, it's her wholesaling, and vertical setup that gives her good credibility when selling. But we don't take, we pay credence to being from New Zealand because at the moment it's working.

So do you think the New Zealand national identity does have an effect on your brands image?

Oh absolutely. People, the stigma, positive or otherwise will always remain. "Made in China." It will just remain. It will be another generation or more really. "Made in China" to you... you're young, how do you react? Is that quality, is that cheap, it that prolific?

It's cheap.

Why is that? Is it still that way? I don't know.

Well I don't know either, apparently, it not that way anymore.

Well I think the merino output for Icebreaker is all Chinese.

It is. Interesting, because I am wearing a merino here and I assumed that it was made in China but I looked at the label a couple of days ago and it was made in New Zealand. And instantly I felt better about it. I thought, oh this is better quality than I thought. Whether it is or not...

Well Icebreaker must be taking a huge percentage of the merino clip, exporting it, and they've contracted to full blown factories to produce their yarn, and their fabrics. That's a significant financial commitment, they wouldn't do that if it was crap would they. But we still, both you and I, still hold "made in China" as a negative. So I guess whether we like it or not, it exists. So New Zealand marketing in terms of fresh, green, innovative, a little bit edgy, great. We'll take it, it a bonus.

What about the whole idea of the image of New Zealand fashion designers being dark and intellectual? Because quite obviously the Annah Stretton brand is completely different.

Yeah, well fashion retail in Australia is mainly boutique based, trillions of them. Everyone that's finished having babies seems to have opened a boutique. So those women who they target can't wear their product. They might wear black and sophisticated to make them look slim and whatever. But if you go into their stores, there is a real strong mix of colour and flamboyance so the reality of the retail over there isn't dark and brooding. No. I think there's a, because our "fab four" can, or not even all four of them, Karen is not dark and brooding is she, she's maybe intellectual, but you know that may be media driven from the historic bases.

It's more the Zambezi's and the Worlds

Nom*D, yeah, well Worlds kind of not so much dark, just loony, in a nice way. So I don't, the reality that I've found talking, shopping, being with the retailers over there, is that they love colour, you know Trelise sells really well, end of

story. Whether it's Cooper or Trelise Cooper, it sells well so money in the bank. They want performing labels, so if it sells well, great, if it's dark and brooding who gives a shit, if it sells well great, if it's colourful, great.

Do you have any specific public relations or marketing strategies that you use when entering a new international market?

No.

Is it just sort of what happens at the time?

Well actually, find a great sales person. Energy, passion and credibility. Well connected. If they were already selling great product, if we can piggyback on that then our product instantly gets credibility. Because if we were selling to a huge market, a huge chain store, then really again they just want product that sells well. So I think that looking for a package, whether or not we've got a great marketing campaign, were not an international label, were not going to have the backup of what Prada has got or Gucci or whatever, so we're not that silly...some of them ask that, what media campaign are you going to provide to back up, to support us if we take your product.

None?

Well that's the reason we are worth buying, because we don't really have one.

Do you think you will soon develop a media strategy for international markets? So through Brian or Chris?

Yes, if we go that way seriously, yes, absolutely. I don't believe Trelise has developed a media campaign. She's got good props, but I don't believe she's got a full blown media campaign and she's selling throughout America, that's through good representation. And again having product that people are reacting well to and buying.

What help have you received to enable you to enter international markets? You've worked with NZTE...

Yeah. A good group to work with.

...for the Australian Fashion Week.

Yes. Twice. They supported us twice.

So that was for the first two fashion shows you did in Australia?

Yes. And also admiring opportunities where they set up a sort of a "Kiwi-made" sector adjacent to Fashion Week, so it was right next to it, you could walk across and come into three floors of a big gallery, really nice and people could wander around and talk to some of the designers, some were showing, some weren't showing, so it was sort of a focus on New Zealand opportunity that they funded and set up. I thought it worked really well.

Have you had any other government support to help you internationally?

No.

What do you think the future is of New Zealand fashion on an international level?

I think it's limited. I think all of fashion is going to be watered down because everyone can do it. It's like music. Music's watered down. We don't have any megastars anymore. We know the Rolling Stones, we know Elton John, those megastars, but now everyone's famous. You Tube, proliferation of CDs, the ability to construct them and put a song together in your own lounge with a few friends and a music programme, and it's taken that uniqueness, that shortage. Fashion has been based on shortage for a long long time. It was special, you paid more for it, no one else had it, you kept it for a long time, because it's special, an Armani suit or whatever. It's not about that now. It's disposable, it's flash fashion, it's in it's gone bang in a flash. I think that's going to dilute, there's going to be a big broad bulky batch of that, that the mass gravitate to and use and abuse. Not really appreciate, not really adore. And I think that's why with Stretton, we've consciously, subconsciously, we're gravitating out to the outer edge of that. So we want to be there, we want to be in the public eye with the mass, but we don't want to be seen as not special. We want to be seen as a little bit more aloof and

aspirational. I think New Zealand fashion's got to be a little careful that we don't water that down, and how we maintain anything that we've currently got or even grow it, I don't know. Jeremy is a good example of actually creating a niche, identifying a niche, of getting, honing his story, and then driving it in a way that'll make an impression, financial and at least a known label. Now repeat that anywhere or at any other level, I don't see it happening. There will be individual splashes of brilliance or success, Trelise, smart business woman and she's connected herself well, marketed herself, she's spent a lot on money doing that. When's that going to happen again? You know, it can't. Zambesi, Nom D, even Kate Sylvester, haven't made a lot of money, I don't believe.

Their names are just out there.

They are successful by recognition. So where's New Zealand fashion going? Down the toilet, no not really. Its a nice open market, a global market. There's more opportunities, but I kind of get this watered down feeling.

Do you think a lot is going to ride on our New Zealand fashion designers being able to draw on our New Zealand identity? Our clean green image as a differentiating factor?

Perhaps sustainability and that eco-friendly concept come in. But that's going to be global soon. And it will be a moment of time, I think we will become more cognisant of that and it'll be everyone, we don't hop on a steam train anymore and burn coal. It's electric, and it just happens. It's not going to hurt, but I don't think we can anchor it. We've just got to get out there and market. We've got to be in the markets that are buying, but, you know go to a large department store or walk the strip of any fashion, go to Ireland and walk down the fashion strip, you know there's only a limited number of big players, and then you go into the key retailing fashion stores and then there's hundreds of labels but again its kind of condensing when you reflect on it. And it's got its own "who's hot" and "who's not". But if you look at the infiltration of labels over here, into the Auckland market for example, then its definitely starting to impact on choices. The international fashion availability, who's got stores here now, a number of the key players have them. So we too, that the reverse of the globalisation or access to the market,

means that we too will be pressured, so that will be quite interesting to see what that does. And yeah sure there's a Boshier directly opposite Alana Hill on the corner, a new fashion precinct. But she's still not, does that give her an advantage, or is that a disadvantage? Or is the fact that she's paying exorbitant rent her real disadvantage? I don't know. So yeah, big questions, where's it going, I think the challenge, the positive is that people will now strive to look for uniqueness in fashion and something special, so they will look for something that can give them their own identity and enhance that. But they will do that through some elitist branding, so there's a challenge for us, they'll do it when they're travelling, because everyone can travel now, so there's another challenge. But, down home, I think people will turn around and do all strip shopping and go to unique stores that are giving great service and provide a good product that's made locally, so there's that good feeling about it. So there is opportunities there, but that's a limited opportunity, there's only so many dollars and only so many fashion purchases made each year. I don't think its a sunny future at all, I don't think its terrible, but I just don't think suddenly we're going to discover the equivalent of oil in fashion here in New Zealand just because we're green and clean, and dark and moody, creative, innovative, whatever. I think even it could be the same old same old really, and the smart people will do well and... what are you wearing, what is the top you are wearing today?

It's actually from Australia. Its from Sunshine Coast and I just saw it, I loved the colour, can't get it in New Zealand, well that's why I brought it, because you can't get it in New Zealand.

So great, it makes you a little bit unique.

Exactly and that's what I like.

Yeah, you see its a moment in time, an emotional thing really, you didn't seek it, you didn't go over there to buy it, so I think that moment still exists and that will give us, that's the lifeblood of the future of most retailers. But I think we have to continue to be smarter and sharper with our marketing, hence our investment. In that I think the strength will be making sure you make contact and keep contact with your clients, establish a relationship, again that's through your marketing,

that's through your story, that's through your services, that's through your localities etc. Make contact because they have got a zillion choices. I can go online now and buy from downtown Italy from Christ sake, shoes, whatever. You know, it's here, it's reality.

Do you think the government or NZTE plays a part in the future of New Zealand fashion?

Absolutely. Because they are a framework for us and they give us representation. But it's a very positive branch of government for us and for everyone in trade. Definitely. It's that relationship thing again.

So you having a relationship with them, or them having a relationship internationally? And then you ride on that relationship to form your own relationships internationally?

Correct. They've broken the ground, they are out there talking, greeting, knowing. They've got names, they've got contacts.

I think it's fabulous that they have such a focus on the creative industries in New Zealand and really trying to market them and showcase them internationally. I think we have a lot of talent and a lot of uniqueness here in our country and it's great to see it being shown to the rest of the world.

I agree, exactly. Absolutely.

Anyway, thank you for answering my questions. You gave me some great information. Do you have any questions for me?

No.

Would you like to see a copy of the interview transcript?

No, that's fine. But I would love to see your work.

Absolutely.

Appendix 2: Interview Transcription - Robyn Brooks

What aspects of the Ooby Ryn brand and designs differentiate it from all other New Zealand fashion designer labels?

Probably the main one is the fabric I use. A lot of other designers play a bit safe with plain, or there is some brands that use all plain fabric and stuff but I use a lot of printed silks and velvets.

Do you come up with the designs for the fabric yourself and get them made?

No, I haven't. I come up with some prints just for T-shirts and stuff but normally there are some wholesalers that bring fabric in that you can make exclusive to you and that's what I do.

What were your major challenges in creating and establishing your brand?

Deciding what, where in the market you want yours to sit. Because my mum used to have a label and that was older, but I just wanted to do stuff that I would wear.

Was it quite hard to decide on the price point of your clothing as well?

Yes, well where I wanted my stuff to sit was where Sabine and stuff sit so I mainly just looked at where the other designers were that I wanted to sit alongside. But because of the fabrics, it can make it more expensive.

It wasn't hard financially?

Yeah, but my parents have helped me. If I didn't have help from them then I probably wouldn't have been able to do it.

So did you have any support from industry bodies or the government?

Do you mean financially? No.

Did you look for anything?

Yeah I did but there wasn't, there was the Verge Breakthrough thing that I did a couple of years ago, now they give them \$10,000, but when I did it they didn't do it. But they did, instead of paying what you normally had to, they helped you out a bit, you didn't have to pay as much as another designers doing their own show.

Do you think linking up with them was crucial in establishing your brand in the market?

For me, yes. I think it's important for young designers to show at Fashion Week, and that's where a lot of, like *Cybèle* started there as well.

What sort of help from them would have been useful?

Lots of money. There's like FINZ and stuff that you can talk to, but no one really financially.

When creating your brand, what decisions did you make about its identity?

Not really. I just did what I wanted to do.

And so it just sort of evolved from the clothing really?

Yup.

With a product that has to change every season, do you find it hard to make sure that the image of your brand (the way that other people see it), is the same as the core identity of your brand (the way you want it to be seen)?

Yeah, I was looking at that question the other day, and I think that because it's me, and I'm doing what is me, that I haven't even had to try to make sure, like I cant be like I cant do that because its not really *Ooby Ryn*, it just, because it's me and I do it, it's always the same.

So your personality is reflected through your designs and your brand is based on your personality?

I think so, yes.

And through that you personality comes out in every collection and that keeps it consistent?

Yes.

Ok, cool. So how do you choose your collection theme every season?

I normally just work off the fabrics because, well I use Coco and they normally help me do the press releases and stuff because I don't, some people say their theme is based on a circus or something, but I don't, I don't understand that for my brand, I don't work like that. So I just work off the fabrics. Well I look at overseas trends to see what's going to be in for next season, but I don't have an actual theme theme. It's all like quite a mixture of different things in my collection, but that's just me.

Do you find it hard then when you're showing at Fashion Week to make it look like a coherent collection if there's all those different things in it?

Well I think it is coherent as in it's all, because the other questions about, it's my personality, that it's all the same even though it's different.

Do you use a stylist for Fashion Week to help you put it all together?

No, I style it myself. But for my latest look book, my model Lauren has started doing a stylist thing so we sort of work together.

Each fashion show needs to be innovative and creative, yet at the same time reflect your personality. How do you ensure that it will do both?

Well I've only done two, Verge and this year. But with the type of music and for both shows I've used, you know the butterflies in my logo, we have the butterflies up on the back flap of the walls.

Is that the same butterflies as your logo or just butterflies?

Yes the same. I think it just happens because I am who I am and so that's just what it is. I don't know if other people think like that but...

Do you use or do you think you would use fashion shows to change the identity of your brand?

Maybe to introduce a new product into the range. Like I've just done handbags, I do belts as well, so I've just done a small, well I've only done three, so I used them at Fashion Week, so yeah.

Do you ever feel constrained or limited in what you can design by the identity of your brand?

No. I don't think there are any limitations because I just do what I want to do and then it all just seems to work.

Do you think trends are a limitation or do you think of them as more of a guiding factor? Does it help or does it hinder what you want to do?

Helps. It guides you in what is going to be the next trend and stuff, like its good, well that's what you have to do, if you don't have the right, like what's going to be in the next trend...

Nobody will buy your stuff?

No.

When setting up and establishing your brand, did you use a public relations firm?

No.

So who helped you with your press releases?

Well I didn't really do them. Because they do press releases each season to hand out to media and stylists and all that kind of thing, and that's how designers get editorial stuff all the time because they are in showrooms and stylists just go through and like, if they are doing a spotty feature they will go through and get all the spotty things and then like a select amount get featured, so before I had them I didn't do anything like that.

So did someone help you with your website design?

Yup, a friend of mine is a graphic designer.

How long have you been using Coco PR?

Two seasons, hold on, two and a half, almost three seasons, so a year and a half.

And what motivated you to use a PR firm?

To get your brand more noticed and in the public you have to get a lot of editorial and that's what they focus on so I was just getting annoyed that other designers were getting lots of editorial and I wasn't so I was like how am I going to do that so I approached Coco.

Did you think of using a PR firm right at the beginning, when you were setting up your brand, did it even occur to you to use a PR firm?

Well I didn't really know anything about it because I haven't studied fashion, I haven't studied marketing, like I've done a media arts degree so I didn't really...

Even know it was out there?

Well I kind of did but I didn't really know much about it, and you just sort of learn things as you go.

Do you think it's important for new fashion designers to realise or to learn that there are fashion PR companies out there and to use them?

Yes, I do.

Right at the beginning?

Well maybe not right at the start but definitely after a season or two if it's going well. But at the start, like a I know a couple of young designers have approached PR agents, like after one season and they are like well maybe wait a bit just to see, like people might not like their brand so there's no point in getting a PR agent as well, so they wait a little bit just to see if the brand is going to keep going and stuff.

Is the financial cost of employing a PR firm a bit of a deterrent as well or is that offset by the benefits you get from them?

Yeah, because at the start I had no idea what they would cost, but it's definitely worthwhile for me. If you think about how much it is just to do an advertisement, like one page in the Quarterly is three grand or something, and I get heaps of editorial, which is kind of free but because I'm paying them it's not, but it works out a lot cheaper. If you didn't have a PR agent you would have to pay for advertising all the time because you wouldn't be getting editorial.

Plus generally people believe the free editorial more than they do advertising because they know that you paid for the advertising where the editorial is as though you've been endorsed by whoever's writing it.

Yup. Like if you look when you get the Sunday magazine and stuff, you always look at that rather than someone who has done an ad like a couple of pages before.

Why did you choose Coco PR as opposed to other PR firms?

They were quite new, first actually I approached Mint Condition but they were full, and he said that I should try Coco, they've just started and they are really good, so I did.

So do you rely on them to handle the media or do you prefer to handle the media yourself?

No, I hate media.

So you prefer them to handle all the media?

Yup.

What public relations and marketing strategies do you use? ... do you do any advertising?

Yes I do, mainly locally, like in the Tempo or I have done a couple in Remix and stuff, but I don't find it beneficial at all. Like we've had a shop here for almost

two years and I've advertised in the Cambridge Edition and the Tempo and stuff and there's still people from Hamilton and Cambridge that come in and are like "oh when did you open", and I'm like "oh my gosh do you not read the paper?" So I don't really see the point now in advertising in the Edition, and not really the Tempo because I still have Hamilton people, and it's been two years, so I don't really get anything out of it. But with editorial, like with Canvas and Sunday, I get people ringing all the time from Auckland.

So what motivated your decision to open a store, because a lot of new designers and even established designers don't have their own stores?

Yeah, mainly just to be able to have a concept store of all *Ooby Ryn*, like other shops they just stock selected pieces, just so I can offer everything I do, but plus we have other designers as well. And we live in Cambridge and there wasn't anything similar so we thought we would open a shop.

Do you think it was a way for you to get your name out there as well? Having a shop with the same name as your brand?

I mainly did it just because my mum really wanted to open a shop. So I don't know if I would want a shop forever...but yeah.

It wasn't a big financial consideration?

Yeah it was, but I had help.

So what sort of magazines, website, newspapers, and TV do you focussed on being published in?

Often in Sunday, been in Canvas a couple of times, its kind of harder to get into Canvas, I don't think the lady likes my PR agents. And Runway was quite difficult because... do you know Stacey Gregg?

Yup.

Well she's not a very nice lady, a lot of people have a lot of problems with her... but my stuff is on there. What else have I been in, did I say Remix? It's mainly in Pulp, Remix, Sunday, Canvas, Tempo, and Cleo actually.

Cleo, did they approach you?

Yup, everyone goes to Coco. But I want to be in Fashion Quarterly, like editorial, and I think, they've taken a few things so hopefully soon I'll be in Fashion Quarterly.

And that because that is more of a premier magazine?

Yeah, oh I have been in Simply You as well, but I think that Fashion Quarterly is mainly where I want it to be, it's a little bit younger than Simply You and...

They are the sort of people that would buy you clothes? The people that read it?

Yeah.

How many fashion shows or events do you do a year?

Well mainly just Fashion Week. But then there's some things like if like St Peters did a wearable arts thing and the girls did a little show of my clothes and stuff, just like some little things like that.

So local?

Yup. And but otherwise, well it ends up costing a lot with models and with food and wine and our shop's really small so you can't really do it in our shop.

So you would have to hire a venue.

Yup.

So your local shows, do you do them to get your name out there or do you do them just to help out the community.

Just to help out really.

Have you ever dressed celebrities or do you know of celebrities who wear your designs?

Just celebrities from Shortland Street. Tanya, she wore one of my dresses to the Qantas Media Awards and Helena McCalbine, the C4 presenter, she wears it quite a lot on C4 when she does her shows on Thursday nights. And who else... oh Tanya also brought a dress, so to wear normally. Just mainly Shortland Street people.

What impact has this had on your brand?

I don't know if I have got a lot out of it, well I'm not really sure, but it's just good to be able to tell other shops and other people because then they think someone famous is wearing your clothes so it makes them want them.

Gives them more credibility...

Yes.

What is your best publicity tool to increase brand recognition?

Probably just keep getting a lot of editorial.

Because you say advertising doesn't work?

Well I don't know if it doesn't work, but when I advertise in Remix and Pulp it's quite expensive, but I think editorial is quite different from advertising, or so my PR agent tells me. Advertising is placing your brand next to other brands and editorial, I don't know, for me I just think editorial works. And advertising just costs a lot.

What factors do you use to measure the success of your brand?

Well my mum does my sales for me, so she's just been around New Zealand selling my next winter range, just picking up lots, well I've got lots of new stockists in New Zealand and then also keeping the same stockists, getting new stockists, and getting a lot of editorial.

So you're not so concerned with your brand making money?

Oh well yeah that too, but that comes with getting new stockists.

How important are you as the spokesperson for your brand?

I don't really want to be the spokesperson of my brand. That's why I have Coco. I'd rather it just be about the clothes.

So you haven't had any media training?

No.

And you don't want to?

No. Well I don't know, I guess it depends where my brand's going to go as to whether I will have to. I guess I'll have to at some stage, but I don't like it but I think I'll have to get better at it.

Do you take up media opportunities whenever possible or are you selective with media opportunities?

Well it is mostly good so Coco just get some stylists into the showroom and, it is all mostly good because it is designer clothing anyway.

Have you had a lot of, or any, negative PR?

Oh when my clothes first went on Runway, I had a little bit of an argument with Stacey Gregg and she wrote, it wasn't anything bad about my clothes which was good, she was just not being very nice about the name *Ooby Ryn*. She said it sounds Gaelic and Hessian weave and I should change it. She was just being horrid.

Does your manufacture of products in New Zealand have an effect on the identity and image of your brand?

Yes.

Do you market it as being New Zealand made?

I do. But I don't push it strongly, but in my press releases they always write that everything's made in New Zealand. Because heaps of people are going offshore.

As your brand grows do you think you will move your manufacturing overseas?

I have no idea. Preferably stay here but if it gets big then we might not have an option. We'll see, I don't know.

Do your clothes get made here in Cambridge?

Mainly in the Waikato, but we have got another lady from Kaurau and a CMT factory in Auckland.

A fashion designer often partners with sponsors at major fashion events. Have you partnered with sponsors for Air New Zealand Fashion Week?

Yes I did with Alcabello, they are a Spanish company, they do clothing but we did a sponsorship thing and we showed their bags and also Paul Williams Goldsmith, he does jewellery.

How did you choose these sponsors?

Paul Williams approached me, and so we showed all their jewellery in the show and Alcabello, my parents were in Mexico and they were at a polo game and they had a stand there, and mum got their details and when she came back here she emailed them and asked if they wanted to be part of our show at Fashion Week and they said yes.

Are you quite careful to make sure that the style of their products is quite similar the style of your designs?

Well I think I just liked all their bags and Paul's jewellery, so I think that just comes back to the personality of my designs as well and if I like it then obviously it would go. Also, Paul, we talked over what sort of stuff I wanted to go with my clothes and they made that stuff.

Yes, because they specially designed some pieces for Fashion Week, didn't they?

Yes.

And do you sell that stuff in your shop?

We do have some in our store, not a lot but at the moment, we are getting a jewellery case made to put the jewellery in.

I have read that you are looking at expanding into international markets. How long have you been planning this for?

I do have a few stockists in Australia.

How long have you had those stockists for?

Since last winter. But just with all the financial stuff going on at the moment, some are bad payers, and I want to find an agent over there but also they are a bit wary about taking on new labels because of all the money stuff and yeah.

So they are worried that you won't provide them with the clothing and you are worried that they won't provide you with the money?

And the shops over there being so quiet might not be able to afford to pay.

What research have you done into exporting?

Just mainly looking at different areas and where my label would sit alongside and what it would sit alongside. Mainly just looking at different shops. But it's so huge, like it's hard to know where to start. That's why I want to get an agent because they already have a lot of contacts over there.

So are you only looking at going into Australia? Not any further?

Oh yeah I would but because, for now just Australia but eventually overseas. But because our seasons are different it's hard because I don't quite know how I'd do that yet, I haven't been doing it for long so I don't really know what I'm doing.

Have you researched any government grants or New Zealand Trade & Enterprise help and support yet?

No not really.

Do you think you will?

Yes. I want to show at Rosemount.

Next year?

Yup. Because that shows your summer as well, over here you normally only show your winter.

What strategies will you need to successfully break into the Aussie markets? Do you think you will need to do a lot of advertising or do you think you would hire a PR firm?

First I need to find an agent or a distributor and then I guess I really would need a PR agent over there. Well the agent might have a showroom or something, that is stuff I need to research. It's just really hard because it's just my mum and I and it's hard to do everything.

Time wise?

Yeah.

Do you think it would be quite helpful if FINZ or someone like that had a step by step guidebook on how to export or put on workshops on exporting?

They do do workshops, but again I just don't have enough time to go.

So it really is a time issue?

Yeah and especially because we have our own shop as well and I work in there and I design all my ranges.

So the support and help that you will you need to go overseas, do you think it would be beneficial if, like all these questions that you have about, whether you would employ a PR firm and things like that, whether someone like FINZ did gather all that information together and publish it somewhere like on their website so you could just read it and know as opposed to having to research it yourself?

Yes, especially with the time thing.

What further help would be beneficial to you and other fashion designers wanting to export? Financial? Information?

Well depends if, like with an agent they get a percentage, but I guess it depends on whether you have to employ a PR agent as well but otherwise, I presume that it's just kind of like wholesaling in New Zealand.

And I suppose it is quite hard at the moment with the whole financial crisis and with our dollar being so unstable, you don't really know. And Australia is apparently heading towards a recession and if they do, then how's that going to affect you.

And that's also for next winter, if it gets worse, all these people who have ordered lots of stuff, and we have to get it made, but what happens if they can't pay us.

Does that happen often?

No, but just with it being bad at the moment.

Are they more likely to return your stock?

No they can't do that. We have contracts with them, terms of trade. They can't send it back unless it's faulty. But then if they can't pay, then, Baycorp or whoever can go after them.

But you have to pay them to do that... and then if they still can't pay...

They will probably go into liquidation and then I won't get anything at all. That has happened to one shop but it wasn't that far away so we just went in and took my clothes back. But with other designers who couldn't get their stuff, well they just sort of lose out and when everything gets sold, they only get a little percentage, it gets split somehow.

Do you think the New Zealand national identity will have an effect on your image internationally? If so, in what way?

Yeah, but I don't really know a lot about the overseas markets, but I know that they think that New Zealand designers are really innovative so I don't know, maybe that would help.

So do you think that when you go into Australia you will say, I am a New Zealand fashion designer, promote yourself as being a designer from New Zealand?

Yeah.

Because this would be a point of differentiation?

Well it probably wouldn't be because there are heaps of New Zealand designers already over there so it wouldn't be anything different, but hopefully my designs are different.

Appendix 3: Interview Transcription - Jo Robertson

What aspects of the New Life Clothing brands and designs differentiate it from all other New Zealand fashion designer (and maternity) labels?

I suppose the main thing that really differentiates us is that our fits are really good, like our fits are made for the kiwi figure, so there's room for your bum and your thighs.

Do you find that international labels just don't have that same fit?

No. Girls that buy our extra smalls have to buy Australian mediums. You know, it's kind of a bit degrading, when your pregnant your putting on weight anyway, girls like to feel good and yeah there's nothing worse than going from a size eight to a medium, when really all you've got is a bump in front of you.

Do you find that the kiwi figure is quite different from women's figures internationally?

It used to be, I don't think it is as much now because your Chinese ladies and people like that are starting to eat our more European foods anyway. Australians definitely don't probably have the same hips as we do, but they are getting more like us and we are getting more like them because there's that whole multicultural thing now. It's definitely not like it was back in my mothers year where you definitely could tell a Kiwi woman versus an Aussie woman.

What were your major challenges in creating and establishing your brand?

Obviously financial really to start off with. Because we didn't really plan to start the brand, it's more like we were asked to do it. A shop approached and said would you put some stuff in our shop, so it sort of came from there. So we kind of started off on the wrong foot. We were focussed on the clothing and getting that out, and then we tried to brand afterwards, and it was kind of like well, backwards.

So were you designing maternity clothes for friends?

Yeah, stuff for myself when I was pregnant and yeah, friends of mine, admirers were like... I sewed heaps. Probably about six years ago there were quite a few of us that were pregnant. So I kind of just made all our clothes.

And then you were approached by a shop to stock there and it sort of...

Yeah, boomed.

So you didn't have any support or help from industry bodies or the government?

No.

What sort of help from them would have been useful?

There are government grants and things like that out there that we could have applied for but because we kind of did it so backwards, a lot of them, once we had started we weren't eligible to apply for. Whereas if we had gone out, done our business plan, and done our research and all that before we started, we would have been eligible for a lot. But yeah, once your business is up and running you are pretty much not eligible for, not much at all. Which isn't very good.

So when you actually decided to create the brand itself, what decisions did you make about its identity and personality?

At the beginning, not much, but that was more the fact that we had the stock sitting there in a box waiting to go to a shop and we had no name. So we had to pretty much... I just was reading a book the night before and the words "new life" jumped out at me so that became the name, but its been one of those names, that we've, that I've never been happy with. So we've tried to, two or three years ago, to drop the Maternity off the New Life, and that was more to try and to broaden our market, to sell to people who weren't pregnant, but that actually backfired on us because we actually lost what we did, like people didn't acknowledge then that New Life was a maternity brand and the girls who weren't pregnant weren't coming to us either. It kind of got very floaty so we've started to add the word maternity back into a lot of things and we're actually in the throws of completely

dropping the whole name New Life and rebranding. So that will come out Fashion Week.

Yes I noticed on your website that you are launching a new website during Fashion Week.

Yeah.

Seeing as we got accepted for Fashion Week, we thought right we will use this as an opportunity to launch the new name.

So you will be entered in Fashion Week under that new name?

Umm, not as yet, I'm actually ringing them today to clarify that and try to work out where we are going with that. Because the problem we've got is that summer, the summer range will still run under New Life. And the new name, which is *Jo Robertson Maternity* won't start till February next year. But we've got to launch at Fashion Week because we are launching winter. So it is all a bit mucky. Fashion is hard to do a name change because of the seasonal thing in it. It's not like a hairdressing shop where you can just paint a new name on it and open again.

The decision to change it to Jo Robertson Maternity, is that to give it a more designer feel to it?

Yes because that is where we are heading. We kind of, that's the other issue we've had is when we started we chose to keep the brand quite cheap and you just can't do it if you manufacture in New Zealand. And also, the designs and things that we are doing, some of them are quite complex, you can't make them cheaply. And the clientele are telling us they want stuff that's different, they want stuff that's sexy, and nice and...

They want designer clothes but for maternity.

Yes. And so our range has definitely changed to what it was when we first started. and so we sort of feel like we have out grown the name as well so changing the name will hopefully upmarket our brand at the same time.

Do you find you are having more fun with the design now that you've got this change?

Oh yeah. Definitely. And even just because we are designing for Fashion Week too, its, instead of just designing for the average mother that walks in off the street, you are designing for the media, and the retail buyers, and the overseas market and so you've got to really think about what you're doing, and its got to be different. And a lot more fun, and creative. It's not just a t-shirt and jeans anymore. Like we normally do one or two fun bits but for the winter range we've done 12/13 fun bits and then we've got our basics.

Because they are the ones that sell, they are your bread and butter really.

Yeah.

So when you did set up your brand, you didn't use a public relations firm to help you with any of that?

No. We are doing that now.

What PR firm are you using?

We are using two, we've got Gillian from Oomph Marketing, she's helping us with the brand ideas and things like that. And then I have got, for the last three years I have been under Derek Walker from Trade & Enterprise, he's a business mentor, and he's also a marketing guru, and so between the two of them... yeah and then I suppose you could add in my brother-in-law as well is helping with business plans and all that sort of stuff because he is a business consultant.

Who helped you with initially designing the website and getting that up and running?

A mate. A friend. Virtually the same time I started, an old school friend started his graphic design business down in New Plymouth so he designed the initial name, brand and all that sort of stuff and then he got a really lucky break, got a really huge contract so he couldn't take all the little people anymore so he passed me on

to one of his good friends in New Plymouth, Jade, and we've been pretty much with them ever since.

And they are designing the new website and everything as well?

No, we've actually changed to a Hamilton guy, more because it means I can just go over there, sit with them and go through it and it's done, where to get to New Plymouth, yes it fun to go down and see Mum, but there's just not the time anymore.

Do you have any specific public relations and marketing strategies that you use? I know you are in the middle of designing your marketing strategy, do you have anything set in place yet, or is it still all up in the air?

We've got little things that we do constantly. Like we run a monthly competition and every garment that we sell comes out with a little swing tag on it and the client can send that swing tag back into us and we just draw it out of the box and once a month one person wins either a pair of jeans or a breastfeeding top. They get the choice of what they want. We've been doing that for about eight months and its working really well because it helps build the database up and things like that. And then we also do, when people buy online, they put in the date when the baby's due, and then the month or two before that we send them out a letter offering them a discount on the breastfeeding tops. So just a couple of little things, just to remind them were still here.

So what magazines/newspapers/websites etc do you focus on being published in?

We advertise in Little Treasures, that's always been really good for us. We advertise on three websites, Kidspot, Kiwi Families, and now we are also on FashionNZ. Oh and NZ Fashion which is like a sitcom of fashion in New Zealand. And then we are just looking at starting with, we will probably start adverting in the new Oh Baby magazine in October so we have just pretty much said yes to them for that. And the other one we are looking at, there's a new lady over in, whether its going to happen or not, they are bringing out what they call a "Magic Bean card", and if we are part of the Magic Bean card club, its kind of like flybuys, we get, you know they can come in and use their card to get either an

extra discount or earn points towards, you know. But with flybuys and places like that, its just points or this and that and they just state that whoever buys into Magic Bean, like if I buy into it I can choose what I want to give my customers with their Magic Bean card, so if we are doing a trade show I can run a special on the website saying bring your Magic Bean card to the trade show and you will get an extra \$10 off anything you buy. It's quite helpful.

How many trade shows do you roughly do a year?

We do about four.

And New Zealand Fashion Week will be the first fashion show that you have done?

Yes. We are not actually doing a catwalk show at it, just exhibiting. But we will still be there for four whole days so there's a lot of people that'll go past and kind of catch the same, you catch everybody that goes past that's going to a fashion show anyway.

And so your choice to do fashion week is because you want to export?

Yes. It is a stepping stone for us. Ideally, next year we would like to be in Australia in fashion expos. We would have liked to have been there this year, but it's a bit big for us yet, production wise we are not quite ready. And so we thought we'd start with Fashion Week, introduce it back to New Zealand again, try and get some good media coverage from that and then hopefully that will set the ball rolling and bring in the dollars so we can head to Sydney next March.

Have you ever dressed celebrities or do you know of any New Zealand celebrities who wear your designs?

I know that, well 99%, I heard through my cousin in Christchurch that Anna Rowbury, the netballer had a couple of pairs of my jeans, but that was more through Kate's girls going to Rangī College, and Anna's mother coaches one of them for netball. And it was through Kate telling her mum about it, whether she actually went and got them or not, were not quite sure, and Kate's been to

embarrassed to ask. But yeah, there's her, and then Eva E, from Sports Cafe, she's been, in a moment, we're just waiting to hear back whether she will model for us for some of our photos for Fashion Week. So fingers crossed.

And you assume that would be really good for the brand to use a high profile celebrity?

Yeah and because it's in Auckland, and she's a well known Aucklander.

What is your best publicity tool to increase brand recognition?

Probably our website. And the trade shows.

Do you find that you have quite a bit of interest at the trade shows?

Yeah, it's definitely picking up. The first year that we did Hamilton it was quite slow, the next two years were really good, this year was a bit slow in Hamilton but I think that's just because the market's not that flash at the moment. But we did Auckland for the first time last year and it was just awesome, a lot of people, there was actually a lot of people out there that already know the brand which was quite cool because we launched a new denim range and some were like "oh I've got you on my favourites, I didn't know you were doing more jeans." So that was quite good. But it's incredible the different markets you get at those places. Up in Auckland the husbands want the girls to spend, they want them to look good. Where in Hamilton if they walk past with a husband you've almost got to push the husband away to get them in. And then you go to Christchurch and nobody buys anything, but then your website goes nuts the week after. Where in the Auckland and Hamilton shows you don't notice much of a difference with the website afterwards. They buy it right then and there. But yeah, Christchurch was bizarre, people just came up and took your card and ran, they didn't want to know any more and then the next two weeks we were sending stuff down there all the time. It was amazing.

Do you think you will keep doing the trade shows even when you are doing the fashion shows?

We probably will still to the big Parent Child shows, like we haven't done Wellington yet but that is because we have got a store down in Wellington that does the Wellington show and she does really well at it so it seems a bit silly for us to go down there and compete against our own stockist, and she promotes us down there anyway. But we will definitely still do the Auckland one, and we will do the Hamilton one because we are local. If we will do the Christchurch one again, I'm not sure. Women's Lifestyle Expo, they have been trying to get us onboard to do a few of theirs so we may if they will give us a good enough price to do that and I will just send staff members off to do it. Just because New Zealand still likes to see you.

It's a good way to get your name out there.

Yeah and I sort of think well yeah it would be fantastic to be a big brand and you know, running around, but you've still got to keep little for New Zealand as well. If that makes sense.

Completely. What factors do you use to measure the success of your brand and of your company?

Obviously financial, and feedback, and returns really, like we don't have a great deal of returns. And that's always really good, like we get that a lot from our retailers that they hardly ever get any returns from our product because of anything that's gone wrong with them, things like that, whereas they've got other brands that they are constantly getting returns on. So that's always a bit of a bonus.

So really, that would demonstrate the quality of the products?

Yes. And one of the reasons we try keep it in house. That's why we like the girls doing it here, and two sewers who sew out of here, being quite local and niche it means that we can keep a really good eye on it.

Do you think that the fact that you're manufacturing here in New Zealand as opposed to internationally, say in China, do you think that has quite a positive effect on the brand or does it not effect it?

Yes and no. Eventually if we get to the size we want to be we were going to have to move it offshore, and that will actually financially make things better, it will make things easier. Because that's the problem with manufacturing in New Zealand, it kind of makes you a little bit liable. But brand wise, yeah there are ladies out there that want to buy New Zealand new, New Zealand made, but I don't really think there's that big a push in New Zealand for it. There's a lot of people that really don't care. They don't understand I think is the difference, they don't understand that by not enough things being made in New Zealand we absolutely lose, a huge unemployment rate again. There's people who don't just care.

Yes. I think that the biggest concern New Zealanders have, if any, is the quality of the products as opposed to the impact it has on the New Zealand economy.

Yeah. And the thing too is that now China are doing such a good job that the quality is just as good anyway. The fabric we buy is still coming out of China, its not getting made in New Zealand. It's really not a great deal of difference. The other difference is if I manufacture in New Zealand and something goes wrong you can get it fixed overnight, whereas if it was manufactured in China it would be a little bit different.

How important are you as the spokesperson for your brand?

At the moment probably very important because I do all the designing. And so I probably call all the shots. Like if I go out selling the range and they go to me "oh I love that top but can I get it in that fabric or this colour" or what not that I'm not actually offering, I can say yes or no right there. Whereas if I sent one of the girls out they wouldn't be able to answer that question. And they would have to run back, and that can cost them an order. Because a retailer, or especially a woman, if they're buying they want to do it right then and there and they'll make their decision. But if they have to wait overnight or a week, chances are they will change their mind or they are over it by then and they just don't care. It's like "oh nah we will just take what we've ordered."

Do you think with changing the name of the company to Jo Robertson Maternity that you will become even more important as the spokesperson?

Probably, yeah.

Because it's moving towards more of a designer feel, more of a focus on you?

Yeah we are hoping that eventually we can bring in someone else to help me do the design so that I can be more of a spokesperson, just sort of free me up so I don't have to be in the office all the time.

When you are talking to the media do you portray a certain media personality or do you just be yourself?

Just myself.

So you haven't had any media training?

No.

Would you consider it or do you not think it's necessary?

To be honest I haven't actually thought about it. I probably should do it but obviously at college and uni we did speech/drama, all that sort of stuff so I kind of have a bit of an idea of those sort of things, but um, its hard to know because I find that you can say something to the media and they take it the complete wrong way, and it comes out in the paper and it's not what I meant, so there probably would be room for improvement.

Did you study fashion design?

Yes.

So you did a tertiary course?

Yes, I did a degree down in Wanganui.

So that means that you did always want to be a fashion designer?

Umm no. I wanted to be a shearer but my mother wasn't having a bar of that. Originally at school I was always going to be a shearer because I was from a

sheep farm. When got to sort of 6th or 7th form I didn't know what I wanted to do, and Mum's always been a good sewer, so has my grandma and I used to do a lot of home sewing and then this school teacher said, because I was going to do fine arts and my dad was petrified I was going to come back as a punk rocker on drugs. And my teacher said "why don't you go to fashion school?" And I thought oh sounds a bit boring. But I went down and had an interview in Wellington and one in Wanganui and in Wanganui the ladies were awesome. When we went to the Wanganui one it was the same day they were getting ready for their big fashion show at the end of their three years and just the hype and what was going on was just amazing and so that kind of was enough to say "oh yup I'll go and do that." But even while I was there I was going to join the police force. The whole time I was studying I wasn't going to be a fashion designer, I was going to be in the police force, I was just waiting until I was 21. But then I fell in love. And it just never happened. So it's really probably (a) since I've started this label that I've decided that yes this is what I want to do. Because I sort of went off on a little bit of a tangent, went teaching for three years, but by having kids it makes you, it's almost like the hormones make you settle down and say "ok make up your mind this is what you're going to do and get on with it."

And because you had kids, you recognised the gap in the market and you had the skills and the talents to be able to utilise that.

Yeah, and Egg had started at the same time and they put out all these brochures and I sort of thought well I could do that and that's kind of where it came from.

So do you deal with all the media yourself, personally?

Yes.

So you don't rely on your marketing firm to help?

I get Gillian to help me do press releases and stuff like that. And she will send those all out to the people, and they pretty much contact me direct.

Do you take up media opportunities whenever possible or are you selective with what you do?

Yes and no, it depends on... obviously advertising you get hounded all the time. So we are definitely very picky about that. Especially local newspapers and things like that, we just find they don't work. Advertising in those just don't work. People just don't really look for this sort of thing in the newspaper. We've tested some of the other magazines like Littleys but the free magazines we don't seem to get much response from them either, so we've definitely got a lot more picky than we used to be. And then when it comes to editorials and stories and things like that, it depends on when they want to do it and whether it's going to hit anything we are doing at the same time. Like when I first started, I just let them write whatever they wanted. But now you definitely, because they can, most of the time they write pretty good stories, but every once in a while they will get something completely wrong and it can actually affect you. So especially now we are doing Fashion Week we have been a bit picky about who we are going to let have the story and that sort of thing.

Do you think as the company grows you will consider letting a PR/marketing firm deal with it?

Definitely.

Just to take the workload off you?

Take the guilt off me.

In case something comes out wrong?

Yeah that, and so there's somebody else saying no to them.

Do you think using a PR firm will help keep consistency of the brand?

Yes.

Is the personality of your brand very similar to your own personality?

Yes, probably.

Do you think it might become even more so with yourself as the name in the company name?

Yeah I think it probably will, and at the same time, my personality is developing as well. You start growing up. My fashion sense has definitely changed a hell of a lot since it was five years ago as well. And I think that's because everybody's fashion sense, it's almost like, especially Kiwi women, people actually make a real effort now to dress up a bit more and look nice. Instead of waiting until they go out to dinner.

When designing your clothes do you try to design them to keep up with current fashion and trends even though they are maternity designs?

Yes. Because girls who are pregnant go on that they want comfort and all that stuff but they still want to look like their mate down the road. Just with a belly. You don't want to look like you've been dressed in 1999 when everyone else is dressed on 2008. So I think you're forced to stay in fashion really and keep up with what's... like if we were putting out maternity clothes that were not in this seasons colours, they just wouldn't move. People would just go out and buy normal clothes and squeeze themselves into them.

How do you keep up with the trends? Do you have certain websites you look at?

Top Shop, I spend a lot of time on that website, and others a few others. And then obviously when the fabric reps come around they've already done the hard work and pretty much show you what colours and that are in. And last year I've gone to Australia at the beginning of summer just to get a bit of an idea of what they are doing over there. And I've got a cousin who lives in London so I get her to do a bit of a sniff around for me and she sends stuff home and says why don't you try this and what not, because she's got very similar taste to me. That's quite helpful. I don't know what I will do when she comes home at Christmas. But that's been good.

A fashion designer often partners with sponsors at major fashion events. Have you partnered with sponsors for Fashion Week?

No. Not this time. We hummed and ha'ad about it, but we thought because we are only exhibiting, we thought it was probably really no great urgency for it, and we've got a couple of people that were sort of interested but would rather wait until we do the Sydney one and help us out then.

So you will be doing Sydney next year?

Hopefully, yeah. We will make that call after Fashion Week. We will see how Fashion Week goes, and come the 1st of October, we will make the call as to whether we will go that way or not.

So did the sponsors approach you or did you approach them?

I approached them.

How did you choose them?

Both of them actually are Morrinsville companies and it was more that they are companies that we deal with personally ourselves quite a bit. But we definitely, if we are going to do it, we need to sit down and do a proper package up and then we can look, it doesn't have to be someone from Morrinsville, it can be someone from out of town.

So did you choose them as well as being local, because they are quite a strong company or because their identity is quite similar to yours?

Probably more because they are strong companies. Established, well known.

So is Australia the only market you are looking at getting into.

No. We want to go everywhere.

Because, you are already in Ireland?

Yes.

Is that the only other country you are stocked in currently?

Yes. And it's not because we don't want to be, it more that we haven't made the effort to try and get in. Like the lady in Ireland approached us. She thinks it's fantastic that she can state that she's the only one in the UK that has our range at the moment, which helps her, it sells well for her, but were sort of, we haven't made the effort, because we haven't got all the documents and things like that in place. The way we're running it with her is very backdoor. So we don't want to run it with anyone else that way until we get everything in place.

How long have you been planning to go international for?

Probably the last 18months.

What sort of research have you done into it?

Definitely research into obviously, once you've got to know your market in New Zealand, you, like I know pretty much exactly how many babies are born a year versus how many are born into the higher economic ratio, blah blah blah. And so that's pretty much a lot of the research we've been doing for the UK, the US, and Aussie. And sort of picking, like with the US what are the better states to try for, because there is, like we have Fashion Week here, Melbourne and Sydney have their fashion expos, but in the US there's hundreds of fashion things you could go to. And there's some that are just purely set up for maternity labels and things like that. So we can choose if we want to go to Las Vegas, or LA, or San Francisco, or where we would want to start because it is too big to do everything. London I would say it would be the London one we would go to. But they have got a proper one set up by a Parent and Child one, that's a trading event, not a wholesaling event, not a general public show. But it's purely for people selling product to pregnant ladies. So that will be the one we'll probably go with. And that's normally in October.

So next year?

Maybe not next year, the year after probably. We thought we would probably do London and the US in the same year if we can.

Do you want to see how you do in Australia first? If you've judged that correctly?

Yeah. I'm actually a bit nervous about Australia because apparently they don't like us.

Why not?

There's just something, just the impression I've got from other people who are exporting. They've found Australians...

Oh so not your brand in particular?

No they just don't like Kiwis full stop. And that's the impression I've got from a lot of other people, I've got from people who export. But they have found that exporting to the US and the UK was far easier than exporting to Australia. But money wise, it's cheaper to do Aussie first.

The majority of our fashion designers export to Australia first.

Yes and you've got more control. Like if something goes wrong, it's not that far to get on a plane and go over and sort something out. If you send ten grand's worth of stock to the UK and something goes wrong it's a long way to go and get your money back. But generally your going to try to get your money up front, but you know, even Annah S had trouble a couple of years ago so, and I've worked for her and she is pretty onto it financially.

So obviously you need to research the markets over there quite extensively. Do you do quite a bit of research into the shows that you will be exhibiting in?

Yes.

So you are going to do the Sydney Fashion Week?

Yes. Well it probably won't be Fashion Week, it will be fashion expos. Which are an exhibiting show, its three days, the same as what I am doing at Fashion Week, you don't have a catwalk, but it runs parallel to it.

It would be hard to find that many pregnant models wouldn't it?

Well that's the issue and they're not cheap. Like this modelling company that we deal with. Just to get a model to do the shoot we did on Tuesday, which we just used ladies off the street and gave them clothes, but um they charge you every time you use the photos for different things, and because we use it on websites, brochures, posters; every time you use the photos its almost like 500 bucks. Plus the \$1000 sitting fee. So it all adds up after a while. So if you are going to use someone like that you have to be really careful about how you use their photo, where when you use just our normal clientele, we can use their photos as many times as we like and they are quite happy with their \$500 worth of clothes or whatever it is we give them.

Are you looking at going to Melbourne as well? I read an article about how you were looking at going to Melbourne this year?

Yeah we thought about doing Melbourne this year versus Fashion Week but the cost of it is huge. The actual cost of exhibiting is not that much different than New Zealand, but if we went over there we would have to hire all our racking and all that sort of equipment, where here we can just take what we've got up with us because we've got it all. Plus you would need obviously flights, accommodation, insurance, and all that sort of stuff. In New Zealand we already have insurance in place so it doesn't cost us any more to go, where go to Australia we would have to pay the extra. And obviously, we're girls, we are going to shop... you go to Melbourne and you are going to shop aren't you. So you need to add another couple of grand onto that. So it's sort of a good, probably a good 50-60% we worked out it would have cost us to go over there and it probably would have got that extra percentage in sales, but then you've got to be able to get back and fulfil that, if you can fulfil it then you're... you know you wouldn't want to go too big too quickly and then fall flat on our faces and lose the lot.

So you think instead that you will be able to attract enough international buyers just by exhibiting here in New Zealand?

Yeah, the people at Fashion Week are pretty positive about it, so for us, I'm not going in too hopeful because we are the only maternity label there, so the likelihood of too many buyers coming through looking for maternity is...

And you are the only maternity label that has ever exhibited there aren't you?

Ah no, Egg did last year. And next year we're hoping we've got enough models to do a catwalk show so we can say we're the first maternity label to do a catwalk show there which would be great. But it's whether we can find enough models to do it, or find enough money to pay a modelling agency to give us the models. That would be my ultimate dream, because that would be such a good thing for the media. For me, going up there in a couple of weeks, yes we need to find some buyers, but its more about really pushing the brand and getting some really good brand awareness and getting the media to know we are there. Two weeks ago Bridget Hope was on Breakfast, and she was there talking about what was in fashion for pregnant mothers, and the only label she talked about was Egg. And there's other labels out there, there's me, there's Mandy Barkers label, but because Egg have been in the media so much, the media don't have time to go and find people, so they are going to use people that have already come to them so, she's definitely going to be one of my missions at Fashion Week, is to track her down and say "hey next time you're on Breakfast, talk about me."

Have you investigated any government or industry help or support to help you export?

Yes, we are just in the throws of doing that. And working through Trade & Enterprise with Derek, I'm just doing a massive high impact course at the moment where we will hopefully by the end of October have our five year business plan finished and from that we will apply for an exporting grant.

Trade & Enterprise sometimes get New Zealand designers together to show at international fashion weeks. Would you consider participating in something like that?

Yes.

Do you find that there's any industry support? So not NZTE which is government, but from the fashion industry itself?

No not really. It's a very... it might be because I haven't really gone out and pursued it, but I've found it to be a really closed book. There's been a couple of designers who I've approached to say "could I just come and talk to you and get a bit of an idea" and I've pretty much been told no.

So in a mentoring way?

Yeah... I just wanted to catch up over a coffee and just sound out some ideas. But I've found, industry wise, that people like Brett Tracey from Galaxy Clothing he's a manufacturer, he's been really good, John Hiskett from Alibi, I can quite often pick up the phone and ring him people like that, they aren't in the same sort of competition as me. They are not trying to sell to every retailer in the country and all that sort of stuff. They are a more manufacturing base, they are always very supportive. Fabric reps are always very supporting. But the rest, like I couldn't go down the road and talk to Annah, if you know what I mean. Well I might, she might talk to me, but I doubt it. That's sort of what I've found, it's not very approachable. But then, in that same respect, if somebody rang me and said "I want to start a maternity label tomorrow" I probably wouldn't be that helpful to them either.

Because they are in direct competition with you?

Yeah. And because even with the normal fashion people, I would still be competition to them because they think they can still sell to those ladies that are pregnant.

And because you market your clothes as being able to wear after pregnancy as well. So they are clothes that anyone could actually buy and wear whether you are pregnant or not, especially with the current baby-doll fashion as well. There's not a lot of difference between that and some of the fashions out there now.

And the main reason we market that you can wear them afterwards is because a lot of people think "oh I only need them for 4-5 months so its a lot of money to fork out for clothes that you are only going to wear for that long" and so we say to them, "well you can wear them afterwards." And we have ladies that do wear them afterwards, but other ladies that won't, like they just want to be out of their

maternity wear as soon as they have had the baby. But then we've got ladies who, their kids, are two/three but they still come back and buy our jeans because they would rather wear them than normal jeans. It just depends in the individual person really. Some people have a real hang-up about maternity clothes, where others, once they decide that they are comfortable, they don't go to work, you know, that's all they wear. It depends on how confident they are I suppose. Whether they are quite happy to bend over and have someone see a lycra and they don't care. Where other people get quite concerned about that. And I think that's just a confidence thing. I think a lady that can, when her child's three, still wear maternity wear and look fantastic, and not care, is awesome. It means they are full of confidence.

What preparation for exporting have you done so far? So you have done some research?

The main thing we are, and I am just waiting to hear back from a company in Hamilton, the main thing we are really looking at at the moment is obviously individual weights of our garments and getting good freight prices so, if someone approaches me in two weeks time at Fashion Week that's from Australia and wants to say "well how much is it going to cost me to get this stuff sent to me", I want to be able to say "well okay depending on what you get this is the weight, 10kgs will cost you this much for us to fly over and then the duty tax on top is this much". So we would have it all in a package so that they just pay the whole lot because that is the thing we've found hard with selling to the lady in Ireland, is we just charge her for the freight but she has to pay for the duty at the other end. And the duty in Ireland just can go all over the show so one day we send her 10kgs and it might cost her \$400 of duty, and the next time we send it to her its \$800 of duty. And that eats away at her profit, so it puts people off buying. So we want to make sure that that doesn't happen, that we have a deal with this company and it is set out, and they are sending us through weekly reports so we can say this week its going to cost you this much, next week this much. And it depends on the count of the dollar, that sort of thing. So that's the main things we are working on at the moment, and just having contracts in place.

Who is helping you set up these contracts?

My lawyer. That's been a bit of a learning thing for him to because he has never done any fashion contracts. But he has done a lot of exporting contracts, but not any fashion ones so he said that's been quite interesting, he's been ringing around and getting help from other lawyers.

A lot of the research I have done indicates that it is all well and good to sell your products to a retail company, but getting the money back from them can be a real problem and takes months, if at all sometimes.

Yes. They have pretty much said to me, stock stays here until the money is cleared in my account. Don't accept credit cards from overseas, not even Australia, and its just all paid directly into the bank with bank cheque. Which is what the Ireland lady does, she goes and banks it straight into my account, once the money's cleared in my account, I ring the bank manager, I always ring him, he laughs at me but I always ring him and ask "is that alright." And he goes "well it appears to be, it's fine."

Well it's better to be safe than sorry.

Yeah. We are too small to lose, we had a shop just before Christmas close down and do a runner, and we are down \$5000 from that. She had always paid on time, and then come October all of a sudden she didn't pay. And we went and saw her and she sorted out some money, we got \$1000 and then two weeks later still nothing, and we drove up there and the shop was completely cleared up, and she's gone.

With all of your stock and everything?

Yeah. Baycorp chased her for a while for me, but that ended up costing me another \$1000 and couldn't find her.

So it makes you wonder if it's worth it?

Yeah and that has really made it a real struggle for us this year. Mum and Dad pretty much paid me the \$6000, because we weren't quite financially stable to take that hit. Some people, big companies, think \$6000, "oh that's nothing", but that's

two months wages for my girls. So that was a bit of a mission and some companies, I'm probably lucky that I have got parents that have a great deal of money and are willing to support me. If I didn't have them, then I probably would have had to close the doors. And just from the one simple horrible act.

So it would be really nice to get your company to a size that when those things happen it won't affect other people. Because its one thing affecting yourself, but it's what happens to your staff.

Yeah. And you get to the stage too, in our industry especially, is we become good friends. Like the girls out there, my kids think they are the bee's knees. On Tuesday night when we were taking the photos, I forgot about my son at school, so I tried to organise in the morning, I left a few messages for people to ring me back to say could they have him. But nobody rung me back and it wasn't until quarter to three that I went "long sharp intake of breath/gasp" so I threw the keys at Pat and said you are going to have to get him. Well just as she was leaving at five o'clock, I turn around and here's Connor giving her a big cuddle. And you think well that's pretty cool that my child thinks highly enough of her that he can go over and give her a cuddle. So it's things like that, and I don't want this to fall over and then them all have to go and find another job.

How many employees do you have?

We have got the three girls here, we've got one part time lady who works for me on Saturdays, she comes in and sews on Saturday, and then we have got the two outworkers. So six.

So still a very small company.

Yeah.

And so the people who work here they do the retail aspect of it as well?

Yes so as soon as someone comes in the door whoever is the least busiest gets up and serves.

So going international; have you considered whether you are going to work directly with retailers or if you are going to go through an agent?

In Australia, I am going, at this stage work direct myself. Only because I have got family over there so it gives me a good excuse to go over twice a year and do a bit of a trip around. I haven't done a great deal of travel myself. So, whereas my husband's been all over the world, he spent seven years travelling whereas I've done nothing. So to me, this is going to be my way of travelling. I am going to do it on the business. In the UK and the US, I will probably use agents, I have got one lady in the UK that I am already talking to, that does some work for a company in Hamilton. They sell baby products and things so it is I the same sort of stores we would be looking at. And she's a Kiwi so I met with her when she was home last time, so she's pretty much set up her own consulting company so if she is still going we will probably use her because she does all those shows and things like that. And we will probably, once we get to the UK and the US, by then we will be big enough that we will probably be making stuff offshore, so then we will use a distributing agent company over there so it doesn't actually come back to New Zealand.

Do you think it is safer going through an agent, or safer going direct?

Yes and no. I think with an agent, if you have got somebody over there who can be knocking on their door constantly there's less likelihood for them not to pay, maybe. But then that same thing, you kind of lose a little bit of control as well. So it is kind of a catch 22.

I suppose it comes down to how much you trust your agent?

Yeah. But some ladies that work from Tauranga, I don't know whether you have heard of HOTmilk lingerie? They do maternity stuff, but there are two ladies who run it. Ann was saying to me on the telephone the other day that at the moment, but she's due to have her baby in December, Lisa's just had another baby. And she said at the moment, because she's the salesperson, she is doing it all herself. But she has spent more time out of the country this year than she has in the country. And given another month, she's not going to be able to travel much

more. So they have had to all of a sudden put on the brakes and say well. But like I said to her, well if you hadn't had the baby come would you be still doing it. And she said yes but only because she had Lisa back here. Which I don't have. I don't have a business partner. If I had a business partner, which one day we might take on a business partner, then that would free that up. But then I've got a family too. I don't think my husband would be very impressed if I wasn't here half the year.

And you want to spend time with your kids as well, and they want to spend time with you.

Yeah. Because otherwise they will be grown up and gone before I know it.

And so you sort of have to balance the business with... growing the business with growing the kids really, isn't it?

Yeah well we have just started now, I pretty much as soon as school finishes go home, and that's sort of my time with the kids, and now we have just started opening on a Saturday here, just a little shop. A lot of Hamilton ladies that work in Hamilton miss us, so the last three Saturdays we have been open in the weekend and we have actually done some quite good sales in here. So I've said to my husband, well I will come in here on Saturday and work, and catch up on paperwork and all that stuff and there's no other staff members around, you can catch up on all that sort of stuff without being interrupted. I find I can get heaps done. And that's how I've ended up picking this other sewer up. She works full time during the week but she wants extra cash so she's been coming in and helping me do samples and things on a Saturday. And that's been quite good as well, so it means that from three o'clock onwards my time's with the kids, and on a Sunday it's family time. And it means that Brett has them on a Saturday, so it's dad day on Saturday, and then it's family day on Sunday. And that is working really well.

Well that's the good thing about owning your own business, you've got that flexibility.

Yeah. And I think you need that flexibility when you have kids. My father said to me not so long ago, because my husband runs his own business as well. And yes there's times when we really struggle financially, like when someone doesn't pay us, someone doesn't pay him, doesn't pay me in the same month, it can get quite tight, but like his dad said, you guys are probably really good role models for your kids because your not just doing a Monday 9-5 job bringing in a bit of money. They are actually seeing that you are really working and even now, Connors five and you hear him talk to people about what Mum does, where I don't remember telling anyone that my mum was a farmer.

So in the international markets, do you think that you will employ a PR firm over there or do media campaigns in those countries or will you deal with it from here?

I'm not really sure to be quite honest. Obviously in Australia we can deal from here but probably over there it will be whoever we use as our agent and seller will probably end up being our PR person as well because that will be the first point of call for the media anyway. And then some of it they will dictate to me.

So do you think you will launch advertising campaigns over there, or do more the PR things where you put your name out there and the media comes to you?

Yeah, cheaper that way. And that's another thing, when we first started, we just assumed you have to advertise, where in the last two years its like, well no you don't have to. But you've got to make sure you get those PR, media releases on what is out there and really push it and get them to want to come to you. It's taken, it's definitely been a huge learning experience for me.

I think that it's a big change in the market, that PR is now becoming more popular for businesses than traditional advertising is.

Yeah.

What further help, from government, or the industry or training or anything would be beneficial to you for exporting?

Probably just finding the right group to be involved with that does exporting as well. Through this high impact class, there's only one other person in it that is looking to export or does export already. So I probably need to go out, there's obviously groups out there that I probably need to start networking with and just to get more of an idea about ways to go about it. The guy who is in my class exports boats, but he manufactures them, his set up is very similar to mine, but he does boats and I do fashion. But its quite interesting talking to him about some of the hiccups they have already come across. But they deal with different countries, like they deal with Malaysia and places like that.

So would it be helpful if industry bodies like FINZ had some sort of industry training for fashion designers wanting to export, or connecting them together in some way?

Yes. Because when you do a fashion degree it almost too early to be learning about that sort of stuff. But it's almost like, the ones of you that, we were talking the other day and there's me, and I don't know if you have heard of Miss Crab, well she was the same year as me at Wanganui, or well the year below but she got her degree the same year. We are the only two that we can think of out of the 40 of us that got our degree that year that have gone out and got our own label. And you know it would be nice that even if there was a few more, that five or ten years later there were little courses set up that we could all go back, and they would go, well where are you at. And I think that Dunedin's fashion school, they've got really good support down there from the town. They pick five top students into a shop for ten years and you know...

Put them in the incubator down there.

Yeah and I think that there is a lot to be learnt from that. It would be nice to have that sort of follow up throughout the whole country. Because that is the problem that I have found. I haven't looked the Chamber of Commerce, but they have helped the girls from HOTmilk, so I have to go in and get involved with them as well because what I've found with Trade & Enterprise that everyone who's involved with them are either engineers or builders. And there's not that many of us, there's one art lady but the rest are all engineers or builders or that way

inclined. And they are just a little bit too far away from what I'm doing. So it's hard to sort of negotiate that much with them.

Do you think it's difficult as well being based in the Waikato as opposed to being based in Auckland or Dunedin?

Yes. To begin with, two years ago if you had asked me I would have said no. But now with the price of petrol and things like that, and just that extra time to get into Auckland.

Because you need to go to Auckland to do your courses?

No, they do them down here, but yeah it would be nice, I think if I was in Auckland there would be a better networking system. There probably is up there. Like Moochi from Tauranga, they have just upped and moved their whole manufacturing business to Auckland. And you've got to think well they are a pretty established company already, they have got shops in Auckland and god knows where else...

Auckland, Tauranga, Hamilton.

Yup. And if they are struggling enough that they feel that they need to be up there. It's kind of, we probably are reasonably isolated down here.

But at the same time you shouldn't have to change your whole lifestyle.

No. And I wouldn't move up there, wouldn't move my kids up there. I've just booked an apartment just off the viaduct for us to stay at the week of Fashion Week, but I'd rather spend the money on that than have to fight with that traffic and car parking every morning. Both me and Alice, Alice has come out and she has got a sister in Howick and I could stay there. But we have got to be at Fashion Week by quarter past nine each morning, so from Howick to Queen Street we would have to leave Howick at 7.30. Might as well leave from Morrinsville. So I just thought no, I'd rather spend the money, and then the cars parked permanently, don't have to worry about car parking. We just get out of the motel and walk down.

During Fashion Week are you there during the designer weekend as well?

We're just waiting to hear back. Because we are not doing a catwalk we don't automatically qualify to do that designer weekend. And I was talking to Paul Blomfield the other day and he pretty much said that there's only 100 spaces. And all the people who do catwalk shows get the chance to show a little bit, but then they have 100 spaces set up for people to do little garage sales, and he's pretty much said that the catwalk people get first option, and then it depends on what size exhibitors stand you've brought whether your next in line. So he said to me that he might not be able to tell me until the week before.

Which is frustrating.

Yeah. So at the moment I haven't booked for us to stay on the Saturday night but it wouldn't be a major I don't think to book an extra night. Or if we have to go and dump on somebody's bed for a night.

New Zealand has quite a unique national identity. Do you think that will have an effect on your image internationally? You did mention earlier about how Australians don't seem to really like New Zealand designers. Do you think that will have an impact on you?

It depends on the whole, you know the Australians not liking New Zealand designers, I don't know whether it's more a tall poppy thing with them, like they don't like to be outdone. But when you look at some of our top designers and how well they do in London and the US and stuff, I think a lot of them do well because they are Kiwis. The friends of mine who have been to London and places like that, they have said that people over there love Kiwis because they work. So I actually think it will have more of a positive spin-off, apart from Australia, but for everywhere else it will be more of a positive spin-off than a negative one.

I think so as well. With New Zealand's clean green image, and whether that's true or not...

Yeah, like the fart tax.

Yeah, the fact that New Zealanders are known as being innovative and creative and different, the fact the designer fashion labels need to be innovative, creative, and different, you would assume that internationally we would be looked upon as being able to produce that.

And I think we've got a good reputation as good exporters. That's definitely what's keeping the country afloat at the moment. I don't see it being an issue. So long as I've got my product right, and the point of sale stuff right.

Interestingly enough, I was just looking at the magazine in the back, do you think, because recently there has been a whole craze of celebrities getting pregnant, do you think that has had a positive effect on you image?

Yes, definitely. And the magazines like Women's Day and all that, those cheesy magazines, have really picked up on that. Angelina Jolie, people like that, the media love her and, like if Jennifer Aniston got pregnant, that would be everywhere, every time she was showing her bump, like Nicole Kidman's baby.

And Jennifer Lopez and people like that. Heaps of them had babies in such a short amount of time and I found it interesting that the media celebrated it. Celebrities used to try and hide away, whereas these celebrities are going out and showing off their bellies in pretty dresses and stuff like that. So I wondered if that has had a positive effect on the fact that women here are now more accepting of being able to go out to evening functions or to dress up while pregnant?

And that's it. It's saying it's okay to show your bump. Because that's all that's different normally about your figure than what it was before you had the baby. And I know that myself with my first pregnancy, I hated it, absolutely hated it, because up until about 24 weeks nobody really knows that you're pregnant. They don't know if you've just put on some weight. And there wasn't anything, the fashion at the time was pretty baggy when I was pregnant with Connor and so there wasn't anything fantastic you could wear without looking frumpy. Where now, what's out there today is just amazing. So I think girls who are pregnant at the moment are pretty lucky. They've got heaps to choose from. Compared to what we had six years ago.

And I think it will only get better as well.

Oh yeah. And there will be more labels come onto the market, that's bound to happen. If I just upped and decided that I was going to do what Egg did, what's stopping other people from doing that. But that's good, because healthy competitions good.

And it's good that you are starting out before them so you can get your name out there first.

Yeah, hopefully.

And then you will be off and running.

Yes well that's the other reason we are doing Fashion Week as well. You can't just sit and just chug along. Because if you do, somebody else will just come along and blow you out of the water.

And because you are quite established in the New Zealand markets aren't you?

Yes.

And so really, the next step is to go international?

Yeah, and we just want to pick ourselves up from being an average maternity label to being an awesome maternity label.

And really be seen as a designer maternity label so you can demand those premium prices and have that point of difference.

Yeah. We will still keep our good old basics, and they will stay at similar prices. But we want to add to that, next step, upmarket stuff. And because the people who are buying and spending money on maternity are the ones who have got the money anyway. Even three years ago, when I had Lachlan, there were still ladies that came shopping but they only wanted to spend \$100 or this or that where now, those ladies don't even bother. They just go to The Warehouse or places like that and buy their clothes. The ladies that we've really noticed that even here, in our

little shop here, we've just got a little garage shop, the people that come and spend have got money. And they want to look good. We don't really get that many people who come in looking for a real bargain. Whether that's because we have already started to get that image out there? It's not like we don't want them to come in, we would love them to come, because we've got bargains, we have a \$5 bin. But I think that they just, those people don't even bother to shop in other shops now. They know where the cheap stuff is and they go there. And unfortunately that's what The Warehouse has done to the country.

Are there any other factors you can think of that have contributed to the success of your business?

Our business is where it is on pure luck. The last probably 18 months it's been managed, but before that it just ran completely on luck because we were just chasing our tails. So if I could turn back the clock and close up and restart in a year's time...

Interestingly enough though, much of my academic literature has said that a lot of companies in the creative industries and a lot of fashion firms do operate at the beginning on luck. That's actually what they say, that it's on luck. And exporting success is quite often also due to luck, and picking the right people.

Yeah. And I think it's all about timing. That's what I find. It's amazing what falls in your lap when you're sort of at the stage when you're like "oh where's the next dollar coming from or when's this going to happen" and all of a sudden it just goes poof.

It's just about being open to what comes.

Especially because just from a couple of articles about us going to Fashion Week, all of a sudden some of our shops who weren't going to order for summer, because the retail is not that flash out there and they thought they would try and get through on just a little bit of stock, all of a sudden in the last two weeks the phones have gone absolutely mental and they're all of a sudden just chasing the stock.

Because they know that you are going to be promoting yourself and that's going to help them.

Yeah and I think people are already getting a whiff that we are going there and so just the general public are going in to ask. We had a shop in Auckland the other day who, six months ago, said they wouldn't touch me, two weeks ago emailed me and said, "we need your stuff, people are coming and asking for it". And that's the whole point of doing Fashion Week, to lift the tempo a bit.

And its working already and you haven't even got there.

Yeah. It's pretty exciting.

I think it's really exciting and I hope you really do have a lot of success from going there.

Yeah well talking to Sandra from Urban Country, she brought in an article she wrote about me three years ago. And she's hard case, and her and I were just in fits about what I had said three and a half years ago to what I'm saying now. Three and a half years ago, if I had read that article I would have thought "oh nah I'd be closed down by the end of the year." I was so bogged down with just the nitty gritty of running the business that there was no positive spin on us.

Was that when you decided to employ a marketing firm?

Yes pretty much and, employ staff. At that stage I was still sewing it all, doing it all myself. And I think that, it's hard because you don't have a great deal of money, but I think that the biggest mistake small business' make, is they wait too long to hire people. And by the time I hired people, I still didn't have time to teach them what to do. The first three or four staff members I hired didn't last that long with me because I didn't have the time to teach them and it got... where this year, with moving the stuff from home to here, and just hiring Alice full time and a few others, has made all the difference. Pat is the only long term staff member I've had, the rest have flitted in and out after six months because I've pulled them in to help us get through and things quiet down and I think "oh I can do this myself" again and so I sort of send them on their way. But not anymore. Now,

once you actually have the time to start working on your business you realise how important it is to have those people around you.

Do you think it was quite a crucial decision to hire that marketing firm? To help you with strategic planning and everything?

Yes and no. The original marketing firm that I hired in Hamilton helped me redo the New Life logo and things like that and to be honest, yes some of the stuff he did for me was great, but it's really been mainly Derek, this business mentor that's really got me through, and he's free. Him and our new bank manager. We used to go to, and our accountant sort of tried to help me a bit, but at \$200 a pop, every hour. Now the new bank managers are all trained in marketing and that sort of stuff and they are free. I can go down to ANZ bank and knock on Ben's door, sit with him for an hour and bounce off ideas off him and he will bounce them back and say yes or no, and it's all free. I think that's the big thing too, when I first started, you think you should go and see... like this original marketing guy and he was like "oh we can do this for you, and we'll do this for you, and we'll can make you big and rah de rah", and they kind of sweep you away with it. And then they start sending you bills and you're finding that the bills are coming in big, but nothing else is really happening. Definitely if you can find something for free, and normally the people who are giving you stuff for free, are normally more passionate about it, so I think that makes a big difference. This marketing lady who is helping me now, has worn my clothes and that's definitely made a difference because she, with both her pregnancies, she brought off us, she's loved the product, and I think that's really helped because she's real fashion conscious. She walks in here all dolled up and looking fantastic and that's definitely made a difference.

Did she approach you or did you approach her?

Both. I ran into her in the street and, because I didn't realise that, because she's only been going a year, and when she was pregnant with Ethan, at the time she said "oh I'm not sure whether I'm going to go back to work or what I'm going to do" and she was designing jewellery and a few things, and so I didn't think much of it. At the same time we were thinking "oh we really should try and look for a

business partner or investor or something like that”, but I just haven’t had the paperwork done ready so that we can start looking for that. And then I ran into her, probably about four months ago, and she said " oh the uno magazine’s just done an article on me, its coming out in a couple of months" and I said "oh that’s cool, is that on your jewellery?" and she goes "oh no, that was just a little sideline. I’ve started my own marketing business." I said "oh yeah what are you doing" and she was saying how she was helping rebrand Matamata Refrigeration change their name and a few people like that. So I came back here, got on the phone, looked her up on her website, rang around some of he people she’s helped and they were saying what she’s done was fantastic and Sandra from Urban Country said she helped rebrand her husbands business and they haven’t looked back since. Things like that. So I rang her up and said, “would you help us?” And she’s cool, I at the time said, we don’t have a huge marketing budget. And she said “that’s alright, you’ve got lots of clothes out there I like”, so we’ve sort of cut a bit of a deal. She’s billing me half and the other half we will give her on product.

And so she’s helped you create this five year business plan?

Ah yes a little bit. She’s helped do the marketing section of it. And we’ve still got a bit of tweaking to do. My brother in laws helped me do the rest. And obviously the business mentor. But yeah we’re just stuck on that whole environmental thing at the moment.

Whether to go environmental?

Well according to the business mentor, if we are going to apply for a government grant through Trade & Enterprise for exporting, you have to have an environmental section in there. If that’s not in your business plan, they don’t even want to know about you, they just chuck it out the door. They don’t even want to know about you because everything’s about the environment at the moment. So we’ve got to put in there that we recycle our paper and we do this and we do that. All sorts of stuff. He said listen you don’t have to get flash, you don’t have a biochemical plant out the back or anything but it’s got to be in there. But I sort of, I don’t want to put too much in there and say “we do all this” when we don’t do it. There are things we do, all the paper that goes through the printer that’s not

correct gets chopped up and made into new paper and things like that but its just trying to work out what is the right way to write that. It's little things like that, that when you write a business plan, you don't really think about.

Because the environmental aspect in the past has not been a big factor.

But it is at the moment, and I don't have any qualms with trying to save the planet, I just can't do it on my own that's all.

Fair enough, I guess you talk about what you can talk about. If you did cloth bags or something like that for your products, that would all count as environmental or if you recycled any of your garments or gave them away to op shops or anything like that.

Yeah we do have a cull out, with our garments, after so many years if they are still sitting, we take them to the Sally Army.

That all counts as recycling.

Yeah, they don't just get burned or anything horrible like that.

So you do do stuff, you just have to find what you do so you can say it.

Yeah, like the fabric we chop some of it up and give to the kindergartens and stuff, but otherwise the off-cuts and things, most of it gets thrown away. Just because we don't have the storage. Like I know, Annah S, when I worked for her, I don't know whether she still does it, but she didn't chuck anything out.

She still doesn't.

She had boxes of, bits of fabric that I would have thrown. And if you look through her garments you can probably spot some of them, even now, and it was nine years ago when I worked for her, and I can walk into her shop tomorrow and still spot some of those bits of fabric. She's just awesome at reputting them on. She's a very clever lady. But yeah, it's just getting that side of it written and once I've got it then done we're away.

That was very interesting and I have got some great information that I will be able to use. Thank you.

Appendix 4: Interview Transcription - Cybèle Wiren

What aspects of the Cybèle brand and designs differentiate it from all other New Zealand fashion designer labels?

I think the things that you pick up on most are the distinctive print that we design in house. And the unique detailing. They are often picked up as key points of difference.

What were your major challenges in creating and establishing your brand?

I guess, it's a real combination of things. It's about knowledge and experience and cash flows definitely, you can only work within your limits. But in some ways that's a good thing as well, it's a challenge but it also keeps you in check to make sure that you're being realistic.

Did you encounter any obstacles as you were setting up your brand, any blocks that you had to go and seek further help?

I was open to receiving help and advice the whole way through. There was never any one particular drama that sort of stands out, it was more just, I was always quite realistic about the idea that I would grow the business from quite a small business, I had a plan for where I'd like it to go and yeah I can't say there's any particular one thing, it's just across the board.

So did you create a business plan at the beginning or was the plan just in your head?

I did actually, I did have a business plan. And that was partly instigated by a course that I did right at the beginning, six or seven years ago through a place called The Fashion Incubator, and that was funded by the Government, actually through Work and Income I think the one that I did, but maybe other people were on it through different funding streams.

And that was down in Wellington?

No up here actually but it doesn't exist anymore. And yeah I just made the most of that course, it was a fantastic thing, took us on all sorts of field trips and did lots of cost analysis, break even analysis, profit and loss understanding the financial side of things, understanding time lines, touched on things like PR but I think I've learnt a lot about that since, it was very much an introductory sort of idea.

What support did you have from industry bodies or the government?

In the six years I've been going I've received a lot of support from all sorts of places. I'm involved in FINZ, I'm actually on the board but previous to that I have received, just general support and information from Matahe who is the CEO, and also through that network, its just a network of industry people, they are all really helpful, the industry itself is full of amazing helpful people that are really keen to get involved and give you advice. So that's one. NZTE have funded courses through WHK Gosling Chapman, an accounting business/advisory business in town. And I've done lots of their courses that were targeted, you know the appropriate ones for the level I was at. And across lots of different areas of business advice which has been great. NZTE have also given me assistance on the export side of things, I've received a research grant to do, to look at the market in Japan, and also the two times we have shown at Australian Fashion Week, I've had some assistance to get there and this year they sponsored the, or sort of funded a showroom for New Zealand designers that was nearly on site, just across the road from the venue. That's the main sort of government and industry bodies. I also see Air New Zealand Fashion Week as a huge, an important event for us and something that has really pushed the brand along. I don't know, in some ways I have received support from them in that they allowed me to enter at a lower level, reduced costs and things like that, and just for an industry sort of focus, it's an important one.

Would further help from them would have been useful?

I think that I would never say no to more help but having said that I think it's also really important for anyone to learn to stand on their own feet and not have everything paid for and every single problem dealt with by someone else. I mean

it would never happen anyway but I think its more appropriate to assist in the development, not to make it completely about freebies, and I don't think any of the things I've received have been like that, they've been well programmed to assist a business in the development that you are already planning or something that you have to work for yourself as well.

When creating your brand, what decisions did you make about its identity?

I think we make decisions everyday about the identity of the brand and things come along, opportunities come along and we pick and choose what's appropriate and we also strive towards things that we really want to achieve for the brand. I think it's mostly an intuitive thing, it's been a combination of strategic and organic. Starting small I think has allowed the brand to grow at the same time as the sales and the profile as well as the actual size of the operation which is quite a good thing for me, it's within my comfort zone, you sort of learn things along the way, so your not, I don't know how things would have worked out differently if I had made a massive plan at the beginning and had a whole lot of money to make it happen straight away, I'm not sure if that really works. Maybe, I mean some people do it that way but it just wasn't a reality for me.

So did you have a vision about what you wanted the brand to look like, and to stand for, and the style of it?

In some ways yes, I think its changed a little bit from the very beginning, I've sort of found my way through the experience.

So once again an organic process, just learn as you do it?

Yeah.

With a product that needs to change every season, do you find it hard to make sure that the image of your brand (the way that other people see it), is the same as the core identity of your brand (the way you want it to be seen)?

I don't think I find that hard, no, I think it's a natural thing. I think that I make what I love each season, and there's a natural evolution and development within

that. The brand's definitely changed I think, if anything it's grown up slightly over six years in terms of... and that just sort of happens with being bigger and more encompassing, you know sort of grow it in lots of ways, like starting to include knitwear and some leather goods and custom making shoes and that sort of thing, it sort of takes it to a different level and that's part of the evolution of it. And then style wise, I think that's a natural progression as well and yeah it just does come naturally, I don't struggle with that, I don't have to stick to a formula because that's what the brand is, I think the brand is a little bit free to take on new directions each season.

How do you choose your collection theme every season?

That's another thing that comes about in quite an organic way. It's an evolution. I think I trust my vision and try not to overanalyse the brand fit or try to sort of force something into a theme, its more about, the process is more about looking at colours and fabrics and it really starts there, the colour palate. I mean sometimes its a combination, I might have an idea about a theme, but its usually quite loosely thought through.

Quite vague.

Yeah, and from there is just develops piece by piece in a way, or story by story. I like to work with, because we design our own fabrics, it's sort of one of the first things that happens and that's usually tied into a theme, a series of prints that work together and yeah.

So you design your fabrics, then you design your clothes from there? You don't design what the clothes are going to look like and then design fabric to fit them?

Not entirely, no, it's always about the fabrics first. There's sometimes an idea about the design, like where we do a placement print that's really big, I might have an idea about how that huge design's going to work on the body, but then when it comes to actually cutting it, it may not be like that, and also its about the drape and feel of the fabric. It has to be in the workroom hanging around before we can make any firm decisions. I couldn't really draft a pattern for fabric I haven't seen yet.

So a lot of it is just playing with the fabrics, seeing how it works?

To some degree yeah. There will often be a feeling in the back of my mind about what the feeling is that I want the collection to have but again I don't tie myself to that, it's about what's working and moving with that.

How you use your collection theme to evolve the brand? Do you deliberately use each collection to take your brand one step further?

I think the way that it has worked so far, each season has been more prepared, or more inspired or more driven to include something new or a new opportunity will come along or, just in terms of new technologies or new developments for the brand, or new markets, that's a big thing, and that's always about, sometimes that about being bigger or being more organised or new opportunities that come along, like the first fabric development that we did we were only able to do really small minimums, and from there I guess being a little bit bigger and being able to order a bit more means we have had the opportunity to move in different areas with what technologies are available. So that's always interesting. In terms of, was it more about the style did you mean? Can you say the question again?

How you use your collection theme to evolve the identity of your brand?

Again, it's just a really natural progression where the collection evolves because I feel like it, again just trusting my vision and moving forward with what's exciting to me. I feel quite lucky in that way that that's the way that I work and it works for the brand.

Each fashion show needs to be innovative and creative, yet at the same time reflect the core aspects and the core identity of your brand. How do you ensure that it will do both?

Again it's a natural thing because it's about... when the design comes from a singular vision like that, it just happens, it all falls into place. The shows are designed around the collection, around the ideas in the collection. There's certain things that do crop up over and over again for me, like I always have this feeling, this sense of getting a balance between a sense of beauty and a sense of fun and a

bit of attitude, a certain attitude, that changes slightly for each collection, but yeah I guess it's a combination of those things, the attitude of the clothes and the level of how bold it is and whether it has a sense of, more ethereal, but I think underlying everything I still am interested in the idea of it being beautiful in some level, that's not necessarily about being pretty, but that's something that crops up often. And then there's other elements that just come naturally, like the way I like to handle garments, and panel around the body and things like that. So there's always those signature things that carry through. There's colour, and yeah just different ways I use pattern and things.

Do you use fashion shows to evolve the identity of your brand? Or add things to the brand?

Again it's a huge branding experience for, a huge branding exercise for the brand because it's really the best way to showcase the identity of the brand and the identity of each collection because they do change and it is new each season. It's just the best way to bring it to life and give it some attitude and so the branding value of the shows is huge. What was the questions again?

Do you use fashion shows to evolve it or change it?

To change it, um, I think again it's not, it sort of works hand in hand, the clothes are changing and the brand itself is changing so doing a show is a way of demonstrating where it's at and what it's doing. There are certain things, like as far as Air New Zealand Fashion Week goes, I think the shows we have done have been quite a progression just in terms of showing in the smaller venue and moving up to a bigger show each season and certain things that have grown in the brand.

And it demonstrates that you are getting bigger and becoming more successful?

Yeah and that's not necessarily, I mean it's something we think about in terms of the perception of the brand, but it's also something that's just a practical reality, that we could no longer really scale it down to do a shed one show because we have too many sponsors and stockist and media and it would be quite difficult for us to fit them all in there, whereas at the beginning it was a really good way to do

a show and showcase the collection, it was perfect. So it's a combination of being intentional about the perception and also just being practical about where we're at.

Do you ever feel constrained or limited in what you can design by the identity of your brand?

Not really, I don't. Again I feel lucky or in a good position that the brand is quite diverse already, and I think, I've never felt that anyway. I don't know if I will in the future but yeah, I don't feel constrained by that. I think I'm free at any time to change all sorts of aspects.

When setting up and establishing your brand, did you use a public relations firm to help you with strategy, press releases, website design etc?

I did quite early on actually.

So what did they help you with?

All sorts of thing.

Press releases?

Yup, we have a really close relationship with our PR firm, they create press releases and manage certain aspects of the branding.

So they helped you with the strategy for your brand?

Yes.

So was that Mint Condition that you used back then, right from the beginning?

Yes.

So you have been using them for, five/six years?

Um must be nearly six years. We have a unique relationship because Chris is a stylist as well so, I'm not sure how other people work but we've found a really great way to work together that works for us.

So he styles the clothes for all of your shows?

Yup, shows and shoots.

When you come up with your vision and your theme and you're designing your collection, do you talk to him about it as you are designing it?

Yeah we do, we have quite a close relationship, quite a lot of contact. I guess we're friends as well but yeah it's all part of the process. He never knows quite what to expect until the day before the show. But yeah we do work together on ideas and how it is going to be presented and things like that.

So right from the beginning?

Yeah pretty close to the beginning. But the only thing about starting right at the beginning is that it can all change in a week so there's not much point. But we do have conversations about it.

So what motivated you to engage a PR firm?

I think I'm a real believer in doing the things that your good at and enjoy, and I think it's really important to find other people to do the things that your not good at. And I think I'm really fortunate that we came across each other so early on and we managed to make the most of such a great relationship for such a long time. Because it wasn't necessarily a strategy, actually I had advice quite to the contrary that I should not be spending money on PR at the stage of the business where I was so little. My accountant thought I was absolutely mad but I never really had any doubts that it was a good investment.

So would you recommend to any fashion designer who was setting up their own label to get a PR firm quite close to the beginning?

Not necessarily. I think that some people have stronger skills in that area or more experience in that area or more contacts even in that area than I did. I didn't have, that's not really my strength, my strong point, and I saw a challenge in Chris and got quite excited by the collaboration really. So yeah people go about things in different ways. There's really successful businesses that don't have external PR,

or they might have people on their in-house team who can help them with things. I mean it's also the time factor involved, having a showroom set up and all that sort of thing, I wouldn't do it any other way at this point. But we have PR internationally as well which is really effective.

Why did you choose Mint Condition?

I never looked at anyone else. I think, like when you start small it was just kind of, a trial basis because the business itself was so small, I had no idea, I guess I had less idea about exactly what I needed but I was willing to give it a go and because it worked so well there was never any need to change it, it just got stronger and stronger so, I didn't necessarily chose Mint Condition over anyone else, we just started working together and that was perfect so we never considered changing. But I know other people have great success with their PR through different agencies.

Do you rely on them to deal with the media or do you handle some in-house as well?

I try to keep, I definitely have to keep Chris informed of what's going on. Most of the media goes through Chris, some come direct, but I think it's important to keep some sort of consistency with the process. Ideally, they go back to Chris then back to me. Just to keep that consistency there with the process.

What public relations and marketing strategies do you use?

I don't really know how to answer that because I don't really have a PR speak sort of mentality. Maybe elaborate a little bit more.

Do you use advertising?

We don't. Have never advertised. Oh we advertised when we had a sale but no, we don't really as a strategy advertise.

And is that because of the cost, or because you have never needed to?

Yeah we keep most of it below the line. I guess it is a cost thing and it's also, I dunno, the brands advertised in different... I dunno, I guess in future if we had a store we might advertise for the store.

So most of your, getting you name out there is through editorials?

Through editorials, through special projects, we do a lot of projects which are always really great fun, really challenging and interesting.

By special projects do you mean things like designing the T-shirt for breast cancer research and designing a rug?

Yes that sort of thing.

So charity, community things?

Yeah we get asked to do those sorts of thing and mostly, usually are really good opportunities. There's the odd one we can't do, can't stretch ourselves that far, but we have always been willing to give those things a go, see where they lead and they have always paid off really well.

It gives quite good media attention; shows you in a positive light.

Yeah it does, it's really enjoyable, it's really great and it goes to a great cause as well.

What magazines/newspapers/websites do you focus on being published in?

Um...

Do you deal with this stuff or does Chris normally handle it?

Chris deals with it, he does all the lending. He has a showroom so he currently has all the new collection there and he manages all the editorial requests. We're quite open to a really broad range of media.

So how many fashion shows and events do you do a year?

Well, we lately, the last four years we have done Air New Zealand Fashion Week which is the biggest one, although when we showed in Sydney that was just as big in terms of effort and outcome. So it really depends, every year's different. This year, 2008, seeing as we are nearly at the end, Air New Zealand Fashion Week, we have a show tomorrow actually called Dirt, that will be an in-season summer show, its nice to show each collection, in one way or another. We usually end up doing that somehow through a sponsor or another opportunity that needs an in-season show.

So it's usually people who approach you to do a show as opposed to you planning to do it?

Yeah, we haven't ever done that before but we may do in the future. We have another show at the Western the following week, another in-season show. Some of our stockists put on shows every now and again, some of the sponsors, we have previously done shows with Steven Marr, they did some Marr factory shows which were great, and then other events, events in terms of... that's the main ones for shows, and then there the events that come up through the special projects and collaborations.

I have heard that there are a few local and international celebrities who wear your brand. Does this have an impact on your brand image?

I think it does. It's not something that we, again it's something that should come naturally, there should be that fit there, that they love it and that they seek it out to some degree as well, it's not something that we push. But I do think, I mean it often gets news headlines. There were a lot of headlines around Kate Hudson last year and, she's brought other pieces in New York at the store we stocked in at the time, that made it through to websites and things. And often great imagery that gets published, it can be used by the brand for publicity, things like that.

I guess it's great being a New Zealand designer, in such a small market and those things do make headlines over here whereas if you were a designer from New York and she wore something there, that wouldn't make headlines at all.

No, although I guess it wouldn't make the six o'clock news, although I do think that every country trades a lot on celebrities, probably a lot more than we do actually.

So what is your best publicity tool to increase brand recognition? Fashion Weeks?

That's definitely huge, but I guess again it's about the whole package, it starts I guess with the clothes, it's just the whole brand identity. It's about its history as well, and the history and rapport that we have with the industry and the media and things like that. There's so many factors that come into play, I don't think we could isolate Fashion Week on its own because if we didn't have all that other backup it might not mean anything. And if we didn't have the clothes that were press worthy or interesting enough, or a collection theme that sparked off any sort of positive feedback, it would be a waste of time I guess. So nothing in isolation but that's definitely a really big one.

What factors do you use to measure the success of your brand?

Again, I guess it's a range of things. There's media profile, increase in sales. Those are the main things. Press and sales are definitely two of the key things and they break down into where its sold, who wants it, what sort of requests we get and the same on the press side, who's interested and who's requesting it and what sort of editorial we get and what sort of profile pieces, and yeah its a whole range of things.

How important are you as the spokesperson for your brand?

I think it's very important to stand by what you do and, yeah I think it is important. I think people are interested in, it's an important part of the branding to be the person, to stand up for what you make.

Do you think that because your brand is the same as you name, it makes you even more important as the spokesperson?

Potentially, yeah. I think that it is the most obvious and easiest way to put two and two together about who designs the collection and where the inspiration and the vision comes from and that sort of thing.

Have you had any formal media training?

Not really. I've had lots of advice, bits and pieces. I have had through various little projects a long time ago, and I've also, I've had little bits and pieces along the way.

Do you take up media opportunities whenever possible or are you selective with media opportunities?

I think I'm slightly selective, about the time involved. I don't have time to do everything, I have a collection to design and a whole lot of other things to do. And slightly selective about what projects to get involved in.

Is the personality of your brand very similar to your own?

That's a hard one. I think it definitely does come from me, I feel very close to the brand in that it's definitely a lot of my vision and personal investment of energy and ideas and things. So inevitably it is. But then I also can't say that I know 100% what the perception of the brand is. I think that different people have different perceptions of it and that comes about possibly by the different places they see it and what they bring to it, their own experiences and how they perceive the brand. So it's a very hard thing to tell. It's quite interesting.

Does your manufacture of products in New Zealand have an effect on the image of your brand?

I think it does in most, I know that it's really valued by most of our customers at a retailing and a wholesaling level. And by the media. People often ask me about it, it's become quite a topical subject of conversation and point of difference for brands at this point, just in the last year or two as well.

So do you make everything here?

Yeah we do.

Do you think as the brand grows that you will move manufacturing overseas?

I really don't want to. I think that every step of the way you have to be realistic in terms of business and profitability and looking at what the climate is like, what the industry is like but it's not something that interests me at all. I'd rather change something else than move manufacture offshore. But I don't know what that would be, I'd have to wait and see what happens. I don't think that making offshore is necessarily as easy or as fabulous as... I mean it works for some people but it's my hope that it's not a necessity in terms of being profitable and having a successful business.

A fashion designer often partners with sponsors at major fashion events, like for example you partnered with Simunovich Olive Estate for fashion week this year. Who else have you partnered with?

That's little bit out of date. That was last year. This year we have partners Pacifica Skincare, Hellmann Freight and Sunglass Hut, then we have ongoing partnerships with MAC for make-up, Steven Marr for hair, Dirts, and Kevin Murphy.

So those partners, most of them you use their services as opposed to they put in money?

Some of each.

How did you choose these partners?

They are just really great brands that fit well with our brand, good people to work with.

Do they normally approach you or do you find them?

A combination actually. And then more than half of those are people that we have worked with on an ongoing basis.

You export your garments to Australia, Japan, Dubai, UK and US. Different media say different things.

Let me correct you on that. We export to Australia, Japan, Dubai, Hong Kong. We have never done the UK or the US. Oh well we have done the odd order to the US, just people who have come to Fashion Week and ordered it.

How did you break into these markets?

I think the most effective way to go about breaking into the market is to have good representation, preferably on the ground in those markets. We have sales and PR representation in both Australia and Japan, and then the Hong Kong connection is also someone that we know, who is not always based there but has a connection there so it is managed well by people who understand the brand, that's really important. I think that its a really solid, sustainable way to build those relationships.

So did you decide, okay I want to go into these markets, or were you approached by people in those markets saying we want your clothes?

Combination really. We have definitely been approached, we get approached all the time from all over the place. And sometimes, I mean I'm really about, it's really important for me to have a strong solid foundation, and if a markets worth doing, it's worth doing well, we sort of invest in being there and doing PR there as well. A brand like *Cybèle*, the branding behind it is really important and that's the way that it will move forward. So a one off sale is fine but it's not really what we aspire to so, oh how it comes about, well we have been approached quite often from different regions and, each country has been different. With Australia the starting point for what was a long time ago, and I guess Australia is the natural second market for New Zealand, businesses in general and definitely fashion because it's a lot bigger and it's close and it, in terms of entry, there's less entry barriers for exporting to Australia than there are to other countries.

Similar demographic as well.

Yeah all sorts of things, sizing and the currency is not too tricky for people and freight's not as horrendous as other places, and language. So Australia's been around, ticking over for a while. Japan was a slightly more strategic move but it came around through interest from that market and really took off, it's been our fastest growing market. I think our aesthetic just works and we also have a great team there to represent it. So it's a combination of those things.

Do you have plans to export to other countries?

Yeah definitely. I think export is definitely part of the future because the brand is boutique and there's only so far we can expand in New Zealand and keep that boutique image and also because there just isn't the population here to support a huge growth for the brand.

Do you have any particular countries in mind?

I think Asia, there's a lot further to go in Asia and possibly the Middle East. We are interested in the States, recently we won the export award for New Zealand and part of that, the plan is to go to Tokyo to build on what we have there and the second phase is to go to New York to investigate things there, to meet up with some agents and things and have a look at what the market's like there, more of a research trip. Yeah I guess I'm just always interested in what's going on in terms of government policy on trade and that sort of thing, that's always a huge influencing factor. Like just as an example, the UK isn't a market that many New Zealand designers are working with at the moment because the tariffs involved and the mark-ups they put on clothes makes it unrealistic to export there. So that hasn't been a focus. US, we'll see what happens with there economy, at the moment we're not in a hurry to get there. We hope to build it in that sustainable way so we'll look at new markets as they become realistic to do so. We are definitely not maxed out in any of the countries we are in so there's plenty of room to move there.

You have had quite a bit of help from NZTE to export, especially in the Australian market. Would you have been able to enter international markets without them?

I think it would have just been a lot slower. And I think there's two sides of their support. There's the information and education, and there's the financial side. And I think that education is just really important. I guess part of, in the end you can only learn by doing it, but having that support is really really key, in terms of whether, I'd say if we had no support we'd still be doing something by now, but its really hard to say with quite how fast it can move.

Do you still receive help from them, or other government or industry bodies, when expanding to a new international market?

I think there's still support there. Still involved with WHK Gosling Chapman, haven't done a course for a while but the opportunities are always there. We are currently, we have approval for a new grant from Trade & Enterprise at the moment. And that's all Japanese development, to the Japanese market. So that's underway at the moment.

What public relations and marketing strategies do you use when entering a new international market? You obviously find a PR firm there.

Yeah same again, that's what we have done. And I guess just taking up all the opportunities that they can supply. We have just been incredibly lucky as well, had some great opportunities. We were taken to Tokyo last year, we went to Tokyo in November last year as part of an NZTE initiative, taking New Zealand creativity to Japan. And that was amazing. We did some shows there and then we also really made use of all our PR up there, that's one of the great things that happened as well, lots of media, met with a few of the buyers. But I think that every markets different, but in general, the more contact you can have the better. And again it's the contact that's appropriate, it's not just any old thing. But having that support and the people on the ground with those contacts to help guide you, to help get you those opportunities and things is essential. I don't think you could just jump on a plane and, I don't know, I just think you can make so much more of the opportunities if you had some support there.

So Chris being you PR here, does he have any contact with your PR firms over there? Would he write say a press release here about your seasonal collection and send it to them?

Everything that is generated from here goes internationally. It might be changed a little bit when it gets there, like in Japan it will be translated and also because we are working opposite seasons we are doing a trans-seasonal collection, they get summer and we have winter so there's always some things that change a little bit about the way we talk about the collection. But yeah we generate everything from here. We also do quite a lot of the marketing in-house as well. We do our own graphics and things. Emma, who's a really key part of the team, she puts together a lot of our marketing pieces. So that's really important and that goes international, goes across all markets. Might be changed slightly and that might be on recommendations from an agent or it just might be how it gets done.

The PR firms that you are working with in Australia and Japan, how did you choose those particular firms?

Japan, we met them at Australia Fashion Week the first time we showed there. And then we kept in touch, they were interested, they came to us and were interested and they put a proposal forward that they would like to represent us and we just kept in touch really because it wasn't really quite the right time to take on that sort of level of commitment. And it wasn't until a year ago, just over a year ago, that we went forward. But we were in contact with them and we commissioned them to do a research project based on the *Cybèle* brand in Japan because they are there and understand it better than anyone. And we were just really impressed with the way they work. So I think its just choosing them based on how we find them to work with.

So a lot of it is meeting them somewhere as opposed to you going and researching them on the internet or somewhere, rather it comes through contacts?

Yeah I think so. With Japan we never looked at anyone else, we just found them really really great. It's a bit of a leap of faith I guess, you just sort of... and you just don't know until you try it.

Do you identify yourself as a New Zealand fashion designer?

Ah this one comes up quite a lot. I do and I don't. I think, I'm very proud to be from New Zealand. I love New Zealand and I chose to live here, I came back from Australia, I never planned to live anywhere else. I love my family, love the place, but I don't, it's not something I push as the identity of the brand because I don't see, I feel like we live in a global world, it's a global market and I don't, I wouldn't want to put down anything, I don't know, I think that inherently there's always some inherent New Zealand factor about everything because I am from New Zealand, but I don't feel the need to trade on, to trade heavily anyway, on the New Zealand identity.

So you don't think then that our national identity, so that's our clean, green, creative, innovative image has an effect on your brand image?

I think it does and I'd say there are probably some parts of that that I subscribe to more than others. And I guess they maybe have a little more impact in different areas of different markets in terms of some people care about it and some don't. I don't really like to be put in a box, especially in terms of a look or anything like that. I think that New Zealand fashion is successful because of its individuality, or the individuals who are successful, are individual businesses that are successful, as opposed to several banding together and emulating the same look. I know there's talk about a New Zealand look and its dark and brooding, and that's totally fine, if that works for people that's great, but I don't feel the need to be a part of that. It's something that just exists and I just exist as well. I'd like to have some independence from that.

What is the future of New Zealand fashion on an international level?

I think that New Zealand fashion is strong. Again, it's just really entrepreneurial and individual businesses. I think that those people who have made a success internationally to date, have really built for the New Zealand industry or contributed towards a really solid reputation and presence in lots of markets. I think that Air New Zealand Fashion Week, events such as Air New Zealand Fashion Week are really important for just a high level of professionalism,

promoting the identity of New Zealand fashion designers individually and as a whole as an industry, as a destination for fashion. Ideally I'd like to see that continue and hope that it's valued. I'd like it to be valued by the country, by the government and industry bodies.

So do you think that's New Zealand Trade & Enterprise's job?

I think that I'd like them to consider it. I know that it's a private business but it's also hugely important for the industry.

They have identified it as a really important export industry for New Zealand as something that they have actually created strategic documents to work towards over the next six years to try and build up New Zealand's reputation internationally for fashion design.

Yes I know they used to support it internationally. Yeah, I would put my two cents just to say how valuable it is for me, for my business and how we have grown so far and just to have that platform to... I know not every international delegate can be at the show, and that's just a reality but I think having that platform there, and the level of professionalism that you have to step up to put on a show, really elevates the brand, the collection, the industry as a whole, and that's really important. I think that government and industry bodies play a really important role, particularly in assessing changes that are occurring and assisting businesses to grow and adapt. I think individually you work away in your own little mind set and it's industry bodies and government bodies who can maybe sort of facilitate some sort of umbrella of information, like FINZ is working towards that, just to inform people of changes that are happening, because changes do happen, and they happen fast and they can effect people, I mean I don't have a huge history in business but I am aware that things can change quite quickly and that can have a huge impact on the whole industry. And a lot of that is free trade agreements and immigration policies and education policies, talking about the future of the industry and the graduates that come through and import and export laws and tariffs and all that sort of thing. Yeah I think FINZ and, it's a really funny one I know, I've just joined up to Textiles NZ but I haven't really got much of an idea of what they do, except through FINZ. But they play a vital role in

unifying the voice of the industry and keeping up with changes at obviously a bigger picture level. And hopefully, yeah being the voice of the industry, back to the government and just in general, keeping the industry together and keeping in touch. What else about the future, um, at an international level I guess I sort of foresee a continuation of those that are strong and have good design tend to produce good design, I would hope we continue to have success internationally and that people keep trying. Some will succeed and some wont, but yeah.

Thank you very much for the interview, you have provided me with some great information to use. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you. Um no I don't. Well actually, just for my information, what are you hoping to come out of your research? Like I mean apart from completing your masters and finding out something interesting, do you want it to...

Well yes actually. I am very big on not just doing research for research sake. I want my thesis to have practical uses. From the case studies I write up I am going to provide recommendation to NZTE, to FINZ and to fashion designers themselves about how to build a strong identity in New Zealand and when exporting as well. From talking to some designers I have found that one issue is that there is no central point of information so it may end up being a recommendation that there be a central point of information so if you want to export you can go there and it will tell you what you need to know about exporting and stuff.

I think FINZ would like to be that body and I think there's the capability there and everything. I do think people are really lazy, don't quote me on that, but even myself, and its just, the information is all there and yeah there's certain information but then every single case is different so in the end you just have to do it. But there is great information out there and I think people are just incredibly lazy, they're like "nobody ever told me about that" but you just have to figure it out, you have to go and do the research. They might say that they don't have time to do their research but they want to be spoon-fed the information and no one can do that for you because no one knows the actual details of what you have in that box and whether it came from China or Indonesia or if it was made in New Zealand or if it was made out of wood, or has some metal in it, or feathers, like

every single one of those things when your exporting is slightly different. And it takes time. I mean I couldn't be doing the export, I mean we have a great team and we have some awesome support from, even from suppliers, like the Helman Freight who are our sponsors have also been, they are just one of the ones who are really useful. Like when you ring them you probably will get the same information one day as if you ring the next day. Whereas it can be quite frustrating working with suppliers, like freight companies who say one things one day and another the next. And in some ways it's not their job, they are there to do the freight but it is useful when they can help you.

How many people you do employ here?

There's five of us including me. So only four. And then we have a part time accounts person, and students and various other sorts of specialists who come in and help occasionally.

So that includes all of your sewers and everything?

No, they are all outsourced. We have one sewer here who does the samples, or most of the sample and she does bits of production when sampling's over and there's time.