

BUSINESS / MARKETS

EXCLUSIVE: Liberty Fairs Buys Capsule

The show will be refocused to its original mission of showcasing independent brands.

By **Jean E. Palmieri** on April 12, 2018



Liberty Fairs

Liberty Fairs has snagged a competitor.

The trade show created by Sam Ben-Avraham in 2013 has acquired **Capsule**, a men's and women's apparel and accessories show that has been owned by Reed Exhibitions since 2014. Reed, the largest events organizer in the world, holds more than 500 events in 30-plus countries, and also owns the surf and street-focused Agenda trade fair.

Terms were not disclosed.

"Bringing the **Capsule** show under the **Liberty** Fairs Fashion Group umbrella creates an even stronger platform for all of our shows," Ben-Avraham said. "We are always thinking about the future, about what's coming, how we create the right thing to satisfy our core audience, and also attract new eyes to what we are doing. Together we will have more opportunities to serve the fashion space and also build our network of influencers and experiment with some direct-to-consumer efforts."

Capsule was created by New York-based fashion consultancy BPMW in 2007 and stages 10 men's and women's shows annually in New York, Paris and Las Vegas. A Berlin edition was shuttered two years ago.

Capsule was founded solely as a men's-focused show staged during men's market weeks and has made its mark by showcasing independent, high-end designers. In 2010, it launched its first women's edition in New York.

Over the years, the show has struggled to maintain its footing and Ben-Avraham said his goal is to return it to its former glory. "I always thought it was a great brand, but in trying to compete, they did other things to stay relevant and didn't stay with their original idea, which was to introduce indie brands that weren't overly distributed and showcase them to the market."

He said the founders of Capsule — Deirdre Maloney, Edina Sultanik and Minya Quirk — had worked on the public relations and marketing for Project, which Ben-Avraham created in 2003. Shortly after he sold that show to Advanstar in 2005, the trio launched Capsule. And when Ben-Avraham went back into the trade show business with Liberty, "they had their business and we had ours, but they were different and we always had a handshake agreement."

He said Liberty focuses more on established brands and, up until recently, was men's only. Ben-Avraham also operates Cabana, a resort and swim trade show that started in Miami in 2013 and expanded to New York last year where it ran alongside the Capsule women's trade show.

For the last several years, Capsule and Liberty, along with Agenda, have also collaborated on marketing and retail relations. In February in Las Vegas, they created a two-day conference with keynote speakers, panels, workshops and other industry-specific resources. And the season before, Liberty and Capsule partnered with the CFDA during Men's Fashion Week to host two days of men's fashion presentations during their trade shows.

"So it made sense to join forces," Ben-Avraham said.

He said initial plans call for continuing to run both shows under their own names and to strategize on the distinct focus of each one. "They will operate under their own brand with their own team without competing with us," he said.

While Sultanik had transitioned out of the business several years ago, both Maloney and Quirk are still involved and Ben-Avraham said he will be talking to them to explore the roles they may play in the business going forward.

"In today's changing trade show landscape, we're so pleased to be officially joining forces with our good friends at Liberty Fairs," Maloney said. "Our spirit has always been independent, and under Liberty Fairs we feel confident that Capsule will continue to support the industry's most exciting labels, and provide buyers and the press with the market's best and brightest assortment. Change, especially in this case, is good."

Ben-Avraham said Capsule's shows in Paris will continue to be staged as he and his team, "look at different places to expand the brand in the future and maximize the potential."

He promised that as a result of the acquisition, there will be "a whole new format for Capsule next season, with new designers, but still keeping the soul. We really want to bring it back to what it used to be."

But don't expect Agenda to join the Liberty Fairs family anytime soon. "No, that's not my world," he said. "Cabana, Liberty and Capsule are in my comfort zone, not Agenda. We'll continue to collaborate in Las Vegas, but I need to try and stay focused on what I know and like."

For the time being at least, Agenda will remain under the Reed umbrella. In February, Aaron Levant, who founded Agenda when he was 19 and had stayed on board to grow the show, retired from the business.

"The powerful combination of Capsule and Liberty Fairs will provide Capsule customers a truly unique opportunity to receive exceptional customer value," said Hervé Sedky, president of Reed Exhibitions Americas. "Capsule and Liberty have always been, and will continue to be, committed to delivering events that provide a positive business outcome for all those who participate."

 Capsule liberty

