How Dressbarn Got Guests to Embrace Its Name

Personalized activations like 3-D printed lipstick and embossed bags engaged guests at the fashion brand’s event.

It took less than a minute for the artisans to emboss each clutch.

Photo: Madison McGaw/BFA.com

By Beth Kormanik  Posted November 19, 2015, 7:00 AM EST
NEW YORK The mass market fashion retailer Dressbarn has a message for anyone who has an issue with its name: “Deal with it.” At least, that was part of the tagline shared at a recent press event celebrating the brand’s Fall 2015 advertising campaign.

In the campaign, photographed by Patrick Demarchelier, model Hilary Rhoda poses in a studio with various barnyard animals. But it’s not bringing fashion to the farm—it’s bringing the farm to the fashion world. That ethos extended to the event, dubbed “What’s in a Name?” and held October 14 at the downtown photo studio and venue Spring Studios.

“We were owning and having fun with our name,” said Stephanie Garbarini, vice president of brand marketing for Dressbarn. “We’re not changing our name. There’s heritage there. We’re proud of our name.”

The event encouraged guests to have fun with names with a number of personalized activations. Working with Eric Villency and the Villency Design Group, the in-house planning team came up with the idea of monogramming an envelope clutch for guests. They designed a minimalist, deep red bag intended to be unisex—it’s large enough to hold an iPad—produced by Royce Leather Gifts. At the station, called “What’s in a name? Your name, to be exact,” two artisans embossed guests’ initials onto the front of the clutch. The Dressbarn logo was embossed on the reverse side.

At the “Name your color” station, guests could have a custom lipstick created on the spot, in any color. Using a 3-D printer, Grace Choi of Mink concocted the color combination. Then, after guests came up with a name for their hue, they received their lipstick with a customized label.
Rounding out the vignettes was a photo booth from the Bosco in which guests posed in front of a green screen with their choice of barn animals digitally inserted into the frame. As a finishing touch, the brand’s new assertive tagline—Dressbarn. It’s our name. Deal with it.”—was overlaid on the image. The photos were projected onto the venue’s walls as well as sent to guests digitally.

One benefit to the activations was that none took long to execute—the embossers took less than a minute on each bag—so the 300 guests could cycle through with minimal waiting.

“There are so many parties in New York City with so many brands,” Garbarini said. “We want to do things that are irreverent and a little fun and the same time spoil people a little bit.”

Garbarini said that planners didn’t want the event’s decor to feel too “barn-ish.” Instead of familiar barnyard tropes like hay bales, gingham linens, and Mason jars, they opted for the clean, white-walled, expansive Spring Studios, which Garbarini noted had recently been used for New York Fashion Week events. It made for an ideal blank canvas for Dressbarn to execute its vision. In another layer, the cocktails from Creative Edge Parties had cheeky names of their own that referenced barnyard animals.

“We want our parties to be interactive,” Garbarini said, “not just standing around and having a good cocktail.”