

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

5G, fashion and me

September 5, 2019



Mobile's 5G will change the speed of fashion, enabling faster uploads of visual and video content and storytelling

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5G promises to turn the volume on the mobile Internet all the way up to 11 and redefine what we mean by "mobile" along the way.

The buzz around 5G has reached fever pitch this year, as the major mobile networks inch closer to finally rolling out their most significant upgrade of the last 10 years. In the words of William Gibson: "The future is already here, it's just unevenly distributed."

Fast forward

Already a market reality in parts of Asia and the Middle East, 5G will start becoming available in the United States and Europe later this year, with the rest of the world following suit shortly thereafter.

But, as with any major technology shift, it will not happen anywhere overnight. It is likely to be 2025 by the time it achieves anything like ubiquity.

But irrespective of when it arrives for you, what will it mean when it does? Well, perhaps most expectedly, it means more speed.

The typical metric that any self-respecting tech journalist will use to contextualize 5G is how much faster you will be able to download a movie from minutes to seconds, and without a Wi-Fi connection in sight.

And they are not wrong, of course.

In reality, the label "5G" covers a wide range of frequencies, all promising wildly varying volumes of bandwidth buyer beware.

But even the median range is likely to be 10 times faster than your standard 4G connection. And with that, you can expect consumers' insatiable appetite for mobile video, not to mention podcasting, to go into overdrive.

From a brand perspective, and beyond the obvious impact that this might have on your content strategy, this means that your Web site will inevitably become much richer in its use of moving image and sound, whether it be in the service of telling your brand story or bringing your products to life.

But remember: just because you can, it does not mean you should.

G whiz

Video is clearly an incredibly powerful storytelling tool, even with the sound off, and an effective means of showcasing product, from the way the clothes move to the attitude of the model wearing them.

Moving image is a great way to draw the customer's attention to key areas of the page but it will always be overwhelming if it is overused. When everything is important, nothing is.

But to focus on bandwidth alone is to view the brave new world through lens of the old. Years of marketing messages from telecoms companies have left us thinking that download speeds are the only game in town.

Yes, faster downloads will make the mobile Web even richer than it already is, although you can expect all those movies being downloaded over your mobile network to take a sizeable chunk out of any extra capacity that 5G may bring.

But with 5G, the difference is as much qualitative as it is quantitative. And the magic word here is not bandwidth, but latency.

Latency is the time it takes for devices to communicate with one another over the network. It is not the time it takes for the content to load, but the time it takes for the server to respond to each and every request.

If even the smallest interaction between devices currently takes between 30 and 60 milliseconds now, 5G promises to reduce that to just four. It sounds really boring, does it not? Here is why it is not.

5G will mean you can create truly fluid, immersive, interactive augmented or virtual reality experiences that bring your brand story to life, or simply help the customer navigate their way around your store or product lines.

It will mean that people will be able to instantly identify one of your products simply by taking a photo of someone wearing it at a party, light levels permitting.

It will mean that if they decide to buy it there and then, the mobile payment process will be unimaginably smooth.

And it means that at least some of your products might even end up being connected to the Internet themselves.

If the Internet of Things is a \$200 billion market today, this is projected to be worth \$1.5 trillion by 2025.

We expect fashion brands to want a slice of that pie not just commercially, but creatively.

Speed of fashion

"The Internet of Things" is an idea that has been around for many years, but for most consumers it still means very little, and let us face it, that will probably remain the case until such time as it gets a better name.

If it means anything at all to people, it will be through connected devices such as Sonos, Alexa or the Apple Watch. But all these things require a Wi-Fi or Bluetooth connection and often a painful setup process to boot.

5G will enable everything from your electric toothbrush to street lamps to be suddenly, and invisibly, connected to the Internet, enabling brands to offer you advice on how to brush your teeth better, and municipalities to run their cities more efficiently.

Right now, there are around 10 billion devices connected to the Internet. By the time 5G finishes rolling out in 2025, that number is projected to be closer to a trillion.

What does this mean for the business of fashion?

Again, the idea of wearables has been around for a while, but 5G means that it is an idea whose time has finally come, taking connected devices out of the home and onto the streets, and redefining what we mean by the "mobile Internet" along the way.

Given the many analysis-driven applications of this technology, sports and athleisure brands stand to benefit the most, offering the customer advice on everything from improving their posture to beating their personal best.

BUT WHAT happens when fashion brands more broadly start exploring both the practical and creative possibilities of wearable technologies?

What if your coat could automatically start warming you up based on the weather?

What if your jumper could be paired with your partner's, and transmit to him or her the sensation of you stroking your arm and hence theirs?

And what if the color or pattern of your dress could change based on trending topics on social, amongst many, many other things?

From The Wednesday Report, Summer 2019, produced by the [Wednesday Agency Group](#).

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