

Meet Ms. Vasconcelos, a Brazilian Fashion Broker

Contributed by Geovana Pagel
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The Brazilian businesswoman from Minas Gerais, a state in the southeastern region of the country, became a fashion broker 25 years ago. She receives shop owners from all over Brazil and from abroad too, especially from countries in Europe, like Portugal and Germany.

She offers free accommodation in an apartment of hers and local transport for the buyers and has a team of 12 fashion brokers who take the clients to the main clothes, shoes and accessories factories of Belo Horizonte, capital city of Minas.

Also known as a fashion advisor or guide, the broker is a specialist in making shop owners' purchases more practical, agile and lucrative.

"I was the first person to do this kind of job in Belo Horizonte," tells the proprietor of Totoca Tina Vasconcelos, the company that takes her nickname (Totoca) and name (Tina Vasconcelos).

As well as the fashion brokers, who spend most of the time visiting clothes factories, another eight people work at the company's office, taking care of the administrative part and after-sales.

"It is important to say that the cost of the goods is the same whether or not the client is accompanied by a fashion broker. It is the factories that pay our commission," explains Totoca.

"Our office offers full support for sending the new goods, via mail, to the client and also for exchanging pieces with any problems," she stated.

Change

Graduated in History and Pedagogy, the businesswoman was the headmistress of a public school in the city of Belo Horizonte. The change in her professional life started in the 1980s, when a friend from Salvador, in the state of Bahia, Édina Daltro, asked for her help to make some purchases in the factories of the city.

"At the time, the high in textile production here was the so called Minas Gerais fashion group, managed by high society people. With brands like Patachou, Art Man, Alegro and Eliane Queiroz," she explains.

"Édina liked my orientation on choosing the garment manufacturers so much that she soon recommended my services to another customer. I had always liked fashion, and had free access to clothes factories. I thought it was the ideal opportunity to work become self-employed," she recalled.

Promotion was by word of mouth. Totoca worked alone for around four years. She hosted customers at her own house and spent the day "going up and down, visiting garment producers".

In 1988 she decided that she needed more people in the fashion consultancy sector and to attract buyers from new regions of the country, and why not of the world.

This was when she participated in the International Textile Industry and Fashion Trade Fair (Fenit), in the southeastern Brazilian city of São Paulo.

"I made use of the fair to distribute flyers with information about my work with retailers," she explained. In a little while her client base had grown and she hired six more people. She currently provides 20 direct jobs.

Nowadays Totoca offers free housing in a four-suite apartment. "Those who prefer to stay at a hotel may get special discounts. An agreement with a taxi cooperative guarantees retailer transport at no additional cost," she explained.

To help in the promotion of the work of the fashion brokers, the company has been granted a site, www.totocatinavasconcelos.com.br, and a page in publication Guide of Factories of Belo Horizonte.

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