

Fashion Television goes off the air after 27 seasons

The show ran longer than *Gunsmoke* or *Law Order*, but it's no mystery what killed Canada's groundbreaking, globe-spanning Fashion Television after 27 seasons. Fashion news is now the same sort of cheap commodity that so much other news has become, and the taste-making outlets that helped turn it into a pillar of pop culture are being squeezed between an influx of bootstrapping bloggers and fashion houses producing their own branded content for eager, credulous consumers.

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The power in fashion coverage now belongs largely to those who were not even born when Fashion Television, hosted by Jeanne Beker, first hit the air in 1985 as a series of 15-minute specials on Toronto's downtown independent CityTV station. Fans can now watch runway shows beamed live to their smart phones from fashion capitals around the world at the very moment magazine editors are seeing them in person. Spending tens of thousands of dollars on travel is no longer considered a smart investment when access to designers and tastemakers, which was both Fashion Television's calling card and its currency, is now as common as base makeup. "I remember going to the Paris runway shows 25 years ago, when hers were the only television cameras - and maybe a couple of other crews," said Bernadette Morra, the editor-in-chief of Fashion Magazine. "But today you have a crush of people, television cameras, who are lined up to interview designers after the shows. Jeanne really pioneered that. "But Fashion Television, which had moved to CTV, like the synthesizer-heavy 1984 tune *Obsession* by the New Wave band Animotion that played atop its opening credits, had become more beloved than beheld. Marooned in the Saturday night doldrums of the TV schedule, new episodes barely broke past 1,000 viewers on the show's main home, the subscription-only Fashion Television Channel. While the show's poor performance was due partly to the low penetration of that 11-year-old channel, which is in about 800,000 Canadian homes, a recent Sunday afternoon airing on the main CTV channel attracted a puny viewership of 171,000. The irony of Wednesday's announcement that the show is cancelled is that Fashion Television, which expanded to a half-hour weekly format in the fall of 1986, kicked itself into existence with the same scrappy independent spirit that is now the province of the new media outlets that have supplanted it. Ms. Beker's assertive charm helped open doors to previously unseen redoubts, like the designer Valentino's Paris atelier. Its original network, CityTV, which was ruthless about using new technology to reduce the size of its crews, helped prove production could be done on the cheap. As viewers became accustomed to the new cut-rate aesthetic, the field was primed for the rise of individuals toting flip phones. Many fashion labels began to produce videos of their own shows, further squeezing the established outlets. Still, Canadian fashion designers mourned the news. The Toronto-born women's wear designer David Dixon recalled his debut on the show in the late 1990s as "life-altering." "It was really quite the awe-inspiring moment because every designer wanted to be featured, and over the years they've continued supporting the brand," he said. Ms. Morra added, "For fashion people, it was like *Hockey Night* in Canada. It is a long-standing Canadian institution, and we don't have a lot of those." Bell Media positioned Wednesday's announcement as a "suspension" of production, and noted that Ms. Beker will remain with the parent company. A spokesman said: "She still will be the face of fashion for Bell Media." With a report from The Canadian Press.