Alumna Rocío “Roxy” Castro ’02 is living proof that persistence pays off. After falling in love with the fashion industry during a semester abroad in London her senior year, she decided she wanted to work for a celebrity clothing line. Castro set her sights on Sean “P. Diddy” Combs’s Sean John Clothing, Inc.

She didn’t have any connections in the fashion industry, but she made sure the hiring managers at Sean John got to know her. Castro submitted her résumé every single day for six months. An entry-level position finally opened up, and she got the job just a month after graduation.

Castro met Combs about a month after she started working for his company. She was soon working directly with the hip-hop mogul, who plays an extremely hands-on role in his business. A broadcast journalism major in the College of Arts and Sciences’ School of Communication who graduated cum laude, Castro was assigned to a marketing team, which forced her to acquire new skills on the job.

“It was boot camp, but it was the best boot camp I could have had,” says Castro. “I learned so much. I wouldn’t change the experience.”

Castro started out marketing the Sean John clothing line, as well as Combs’s other ventures, including his 2004 star turn in Raisin in the Sun on Broadway and his “Diddy Runs the City” campaign, during which he ran the 2003 New York City Marathon to raise $1 million for charity. Her job eventually grew to include licensing, on which she decided to focus once she left Sean John.

Castro has worked for several companies in the industry and is now the licensing director for Cole Haan, a high-end retailer of leather goods that outsources its outerwear, hosiery, children’s shoes, and eyewear to various licensees. Castro is responsible for everything involving those licensees, from negotiating the contracts to overseeing the design and creative process.

Cole Haan is currently trying to target a younger customer base by going through a brand revamp. The revamp will give Castro the opportunity to get back to the more youthful, fast-paced environment she misses from her days at Sean John and her tenure at Rocawear, a clothing line cofounded by another hip-hop star, Shawn Carter, aka Jay-Z.

During her decade in the fashion industry, Castro has met a number of celebrities—Beyoncé, Justin Timberlake, Eminem, Snoop Dogg, and Lionel and Nicole Ritchie, among them. She frequently attends fashion shows and other industry events. Castro says she loves being in New York City at this stage of her life, although she admits she sometimes misses Hartford, where she attended Hartford Public High School and then the University of Hartford as a Hartford Scholar.

Asked how current students might pursue a career in retail marketing, Castro emphasized the quality that helped her land that job with Sean John.

“I think persistence is key,” says Castro, “but you have to be smart and you have to be sharp. Learn your craft and perfect it.”

Rocio “Roxy” Castro ’02 is licensing director for Cole Haan in New York City.