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## How should Balmain, H&M market their collaboration post-leak?

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*Balmain creative director Olivier Rousteing posing with Kendall Jenner and Jourdan Dunn in #HMBalmation*

By SARAH JONES

French fashion label Balmain's collection for H&M is less of a carefully kept secret following the release of dozens of product images on a consumer's Instagram account.

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Prior to the leak, the retailer and the fashion house had been slowly rolling out additional details and campaign imagery, carefully ensuring a level of mystery surrounding the much-anticipated release on Nov. 5. While this is not how the pair intended the collection to preview, this seems to only have exacerbated the appetite for its eventual debut.

"H&M should use the leak to its advantage," said Mollie Reynolds, social media community manager at [MDG Advertising](#), Boca Raton, FL. "It's best not to ignore what happened and embrace it as something positive.

"Many brands are turning to social media for product launches where they can rely on influencers to help build excitement and also take the pulse of consumers before an official release," she said.

Ms. Reynolds is not affiliated with Balmain or H&M, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

**Balmain** did not respond by press deadline, and H&M provided a brand statement, included below.

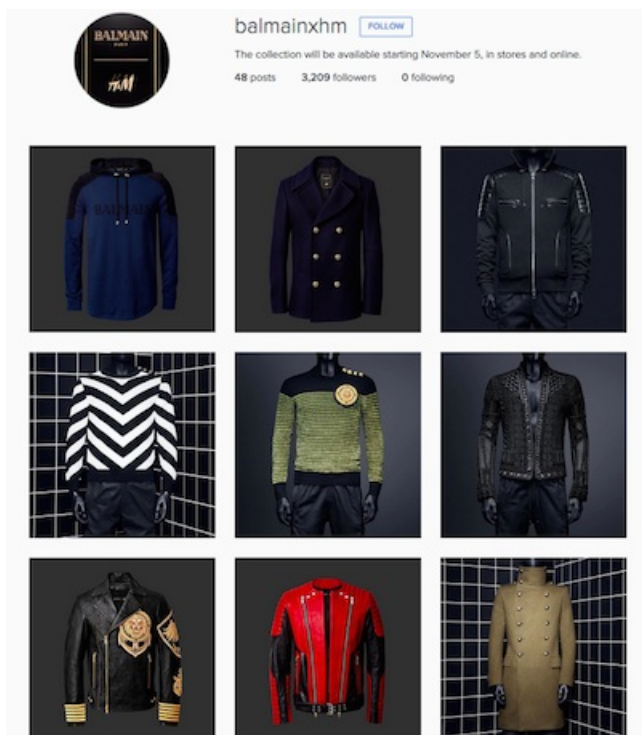
Cat's out of the bag

Starting Tuesday, Oct. 6, Chicago resident Kathryn Swartz Rees has posted 99 images of apparel and accessories from the #HMBalmation collaboration to her personal Instagram account, using the collection's official hashtag. While not the entire collection, it left little to consumers' imaginations.

According to what she told New York magazine's [The Cut](#), Ms. Swartz Rees just happened upon the product imagery via a Google search. She found a single URL with all of the products, which has since been taken down.

This may be a lesson to other marketers as they are in the midst of clandestine Web development to ensure that things are locked down properly to avoid being picked up by search engines.

As of Oct. 9, Ms. Swartz's Instagram account appeared to have been taken down, but the images had enough time to multiply and expand to other user's accounts.



*A BalmainxHM Instagram account sprouted up on Oct. 9*

Since this collaboration was first announced, both H&M and Balmain have been leaking photos of their own in a strategic manner.

Back in May, Balmain used its army of celebrity friends to announce the brand's latest collaboration with fast-fashion company H&M, which will be released in November.

Creative director Olivier Rousteing attended the Billboard Music Awards May 17 with models Kendall Jenner and Jourdan Dunn, wearing pieces from the new collection on the red carpet and posting numerous photos on social media.



*Instagram post from Balmain*

Balmain posted an official announcement on its Instagram page featuring an image of Mr. Rousteing, Ms. Jenner and Ms. Dunn posing together on the red carpet. After the news broke, Mr. Rousteing continued to post images on his personal Instagram account, while the brand went on to share the information on Twitter and Facebook ([see story](#)).

About a week before the leaked images went viral via media coverage and social shares, H&M hosted a Twitter discussion with Mr. Rousteing. Answering from his personal account, the designer spoke about his early days of sketching that led to his career and shared some hints of the collection.

Around the same time, Balmain and H&M both shared campaign images featuring Ms. Jenner, Ms. Dunn, Gigi Hadid, Hao Yun Xiang and Dudley O'Shaughnessy riding a subway. While featuring a Balmain army, the photos still did not give away as much information as the leak.



Balmain @Balmain · Sep 25  
Say hello to the #HMBalmaination gang @hm  
👤 Gigi Hadid, Dudley O'Shaughnessy, Olivier Rousteing and 2 others

### *Tweet from Balmain*

Rather than being disappointed about the upset, H&M has instead noted its pleasure at the reaction. In a statement, the retailer said, "We are pleasantly surprised by our fans positive reaction to the collection and we look forward to share more from the #HMBalmaination in the coming week."

With about a month to go before the collection's arrival in-stores and online, this release of product imagery may work to build interest over a longer period of time.

"If consumers like what they see from the sneak peeks then it shouldn't be a problem keeping their attention," Ms. Reynolds said. "Just think about the Lilly Pulitzer for Target launch. The product line was published on social media a month or more before the release and stores still sold out within hours. If you have a good product, it shouldn't be hard to maintain interest."

### Ahead of schedule

Other brands have had their careful plans thwarted by consumers or press.

British automaker Bentley Motors had been teasing its highly anticipated Bentayga for nine months with different images and video clips that show a little bit of its design, when the brand's big reveal was threatened by other sources.

Bentley began its teasing about one-and-a-half years prior to the release of the 2016 model and had been trying to build the anticipation for the release by revealing morsels of information at a time, but automotive news outlets spotted the car on road tests and released their own images. When media sources jump ahead of marketing plans, brands must be able to adjust intentions accordingly ([see story](#)).

Other times, the brands purposefully let the media get there first.

French fashion house Chanel revived interest in its Coco Mademoiselle fragrance with a social video that plays with the brand's feminine and sophisticated codes.

Chanel's Coco Mademoiselle campaign starring ongoing fragrance ambassador Keira Knightley in a James Bond-esque role was not debuted by the brand. Interestingly, fashion publications such as British Vogue and Elle and news outlets such as The Telegraph and The Huffington Post featured the social film on their Web sites days before Chanel included it on its own digital spaces ([see story](#)).

"If you're going to have a secret product launch, keep it as close to the vest as possible," Ms. Reynolds said. "As the saying goes, Loose lips sink ships'. From your employees to your technology support, make sure everyone and everything are working together to accomplish the same goals."

### Final Take

*Sarah Jones, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York*

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