

INTERNET

Lyst uses controversial stunt to attract attention to issue

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Canine Collection shoot for Lyst

By STAFF REPORTS

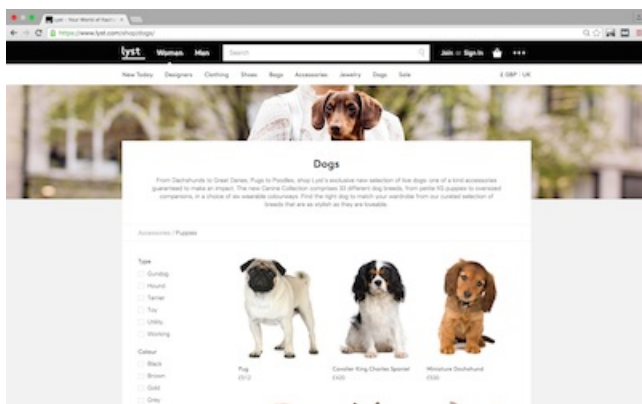
Online retailer Lyst has gone viral courtesy of a controversial launch of a collection marketing dogs as fashion accessories.

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After unveiling its "Canine Collection" on May 9, the ecommerce site drew criticism from the RSPCA and concerned consumers, who were worried about the seemingly flippant attitude shown towards the dogs' well-being. After sticking to its narrative, Lyst revealed that the stunt was fake, and used its increased attention and mentions to spotlight the issue of "handbag dogs."

Not for sale

Lyst's Canine Collection opened to "pre-order" on May 8. The site had listings for 33 breeds ranging from dachshunds to great danes, which it categorized by sizes x-small through x-large.



Screenshot of Lyst's Canine Collection

Much like fashion ecommerce, consumers could filter the "products" by color or size, which it claimed lets them pick out the dog that will best match their style sensibility.

According to Lyst, it will make potential dog parents speak to a canine care team before they take their new pet home so that they are aware of care requirements. According to Lyst, more than 100 people clicked to pre-order a French bulldog in the first 24 hours of the product page going live, and the retailer followed this up with social content

showing dogs being delivered to their new homes.

Ruffles excited to go to his new home ? Have fun!! pic.twitter.com/ArvTILSSp8

Lyst (@lyst) [May 10, 2016](#)

The PR stunt trended on Twitter on May 9, gathering outraged responses from more than 10,000 animal lovers. Organizations including the RSPCA and Dogs Trust also tweeted out their disapproval, saying they were contacting Lyst to deal with this directly. The RSPCA's tweet garnered the most engagement for any Twitter post in the nonprofit's history.

On May 10, Lyst removed the ability to pre-order the pets, labeling the pooches "not for sale." It followed this up with a statement sent out via Twitter, which talks about the 3.9 million dogs that are abandoned each year and links to the updated product page.

The number of dogs abandoned each year: 3.9 million+. The truth behind the [#CanineCollection](#) <https://t.co/JtQhT2BMcy> pic.twitter.com/Hrmdk5Kibu

Lyst (@lyst) [May 10, 2016](#)

Here, consumers learn that the number of small dogs needing to be re-homed has risen 120 percent in the past five years.

"A dog is for life, not just for Instagram," said Christian Woofenden, chief marketing officer for Lyst.com, in a brand statement. "We're positively overwhelmed by the number of people talking about this important issue, and hope that it goes some way towards helping Blue Cross with their vital work in this space."

Consumers who showed interest in the dogs had to email to pre-order their pet, and Lyst says it received many of these requests. These addresses can be used to contact consumers with the new message.

Lyst has frequently used controversial marketing to get its point across. Joking about the rise in popularity of furry pom poms, the site claimed it had begun breeding rainbow colored chickens that poop the accessories. It also sent out a fake ransom note for a DHL deliveryman, asking for 1,000 DHL t-shirts that resemble ones that walked the runway at Vetements.

The rise in digital media has made it easier for brands to pull off hoaxes that reach consumers directly.

A number of brands took advantage of consumers' habit of believing everything they read on the Internet for a little April Fools' Day fun.

Recently brands have embraced lighthearted campaigns, some of which poke fun at themselves for being expensive, exclusive and objects of desire. Social media's daily interactions have allowed for brands to interact with consumers on a more level playing field, letting their personalities shine through ([see story](#)).

Pulling one over on consumers can be a way to get noticed, but it remains to be seen how consumers respond to Lyst's bait and switch for a good cause.