

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Louis Vuitton speaks to uptown, downtown crowd via Supreme co-branding

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Louis Vuitton x Supreme

By SARAH JONES

French fashion house Louis Vuitton is skating into streetwear through a collaboration with New York-based label Supreme.

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In less than two decades, Louis Vuitton has gone from taking legal action against Supreme for allegedly using a pattern that resembled its logo to designing a menswear collection alongside the label. For Louis Vuitton, this collection offers an opportunity to tap into a new audience, but is turning Supreme from foe to friend a worthwhile move?

"In business, animus dissipates when opportunity appears," said Chris Ramey, president of [Affluent Insights](#), Miami, FL.

"Market dynamics will drive new 'otherwise unthinkable' partnerships," he said. "Supreme presents (rather than introduces) Vuitton to a new customer."

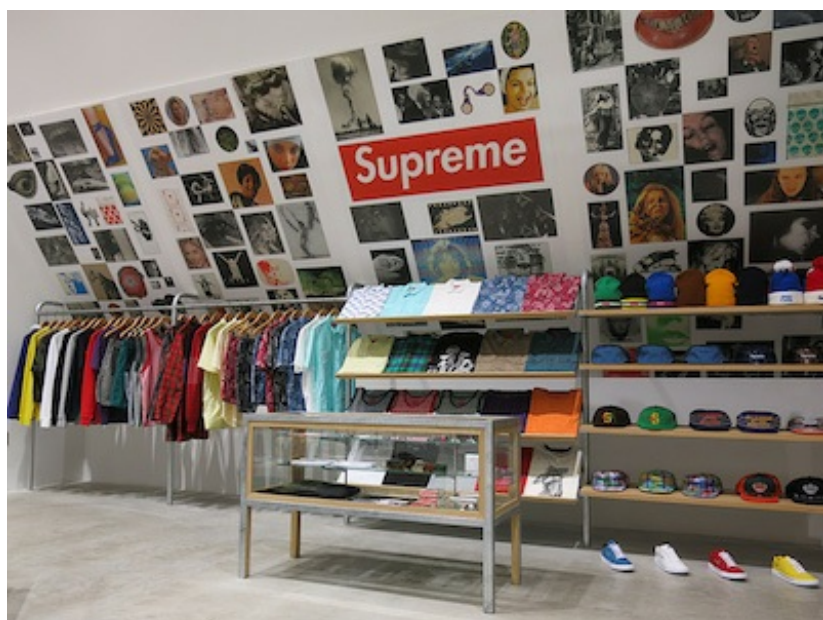
Mr. Ramey is not affiliated with **Louis Vuitton**, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Louis Vuitton** was reached for comment.

High fashion meets hype

Supreme is a cult streetwear label founded in 1994 by James Jebbia. The brand and its shopping experience are designed with skateboarders in mind, with open floor plans that enable shoppers to roll inside.

With limited direct-operated points of sale and a strategy that involves releasing only a few pieces at a time, Supreme fans tend to descend on its stores to get their hands on its apparel and accessories. A demand that outpaces supply also leads to a strong secondhand market for the label.

While the worlds of high fashion and streetwear have traditionally kept to themselves, they are increasingly converging, as seen in the launch of Rihanna's Fenty x Puma collection at Bergdorf Goodman last year. Supreme itself retails alongside Gucci and streetwear-infused label Vetements at Dover Street Market.



Supreme at Dover Street Market New York

Supreme is also no stranger to collaboration, having worked with partners as diverse as Vans and Brooks Brothers.

Louis Vuitton is now getting into the streetwear game with its fall/winter 2017 menswear collection. Debuted during its fashion show on Jan. 19, the collection features bags, apparel and accessories that combine both the Louis Vuitton monogram and Supreme's red and white logo.

Referencing both brands' heritage, included in the collection are a skate deck and a trunk.

"I believe, as an LV fan, that LV wishes to be a perennial favorite brand," said Rania Sedhom, managing partner, Sedhom Law Group. "One way to stay current is to get ahead of trends and interpret them for your aesthetic."

"Supreme is an urban brand and allows LV to provide its customers, and Supreme's customers, with a couture but relaxed look."



Piece from Louis Vuitton's Supreme collaboration

With this coming together, Louis Vuitton is putting its less than friendly past with Supreme behind it.

In 2000, Louis Vuitton issued a cease and desist letter to Supreme, which was selling merchandise bearing its interpretation of Louis Vuitton's monogram. This change in attitude may be tied to menswear creative director Kim Jones' longstanding affinity for streetwear.

"It's been more than a decade since the IP issue sparked a cease and desist," Ms. Sedhom said. "That feud ended relatively well—Supreme recalled the infringing product and no lawsuit was filed.

"Notwithstanding, it is important in all collaborations, particularly those with brands and designers with whom brands have a blemished history, that the collaboration agreement specifically delineates which brand owns what, how the brands will market the items in question, whether the brands can, on their own, launch a similar collection—perhaps in a different color wheel, whether the collaboration will be available worldwide, the length of the collaboration, and the parties' rights to seek redress in case of any alleged bad acts," she said.

"I think that this collaboration can provide a valuable lesson to all brands—rather than infringe, collaborate."

Shifting sentiment

Luxury brands, Louis Vuitton included, are traditionally litigious and protective of their logos, going after those who appropriate their intellectual property. However, this may be changing, as brands make light about logo adoption or seek to partner with those who had previously copied them without permission.

For instance, Gucci's Alessandro Michele tapped street artist Trouble Andrew to decorate his pieces from its fall/winter 2016 collection with his Gucci Ghost figure and interpretation of the brand's double-G logo.

Also, Italian fashion house Dolce & Gabbana is taking cues from fast-fashion copy cats for a series of logo tees featured in its spring/summer 2017 collection.

Fast-fashion players have taken a satirical approach to the logos of a number of luxury and designer brands, often taking their iconography and putting a comical spin on it. Labels are constantly working to protect their intellectual property, but taking a light-hearted jab at imitators may direct consumers to, as Dolce & Gabbana suggest, "The Real Fake" ([see story](#)).

"Finding relevance amongst new prospects won't put Vuitton at risk," Mr. Ramey said. "In fact, searching for relevance should be a core responsibility for every brand marketer.

"To be fair, some heritage luxury brands, like Vuitton, are afforded a market elasticity beyond other luxury brands," he said. "Luxury buyers and affluent buyers are two distinct groups that are equally important to global fashion brands, and there is a commonality to be leveraged when two brands are already found in the same store."

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