

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Gucci responds to sweater backlash with diversity initiatives

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Gucci's revenues topped 8 billion euros last year. Image credit: Gucci

By STAFF REPORTS

Italian fashion label Gucci is taking action following backlash surrounding a product that many viewed as racist.

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Last week, Gucci pulled a sweater after consumers believed the design resembled blackface ([see story](#)). After apologizing for the offense, Gucci is now launching the first initiatives in a long-term plan to amplify cultural diversity and awareness in its company, which will extend to hiring and educational programs.

"We accept full accountability for this incident, which has clearly exposed shortfalls in our ongoing strategic approach to embedding diversity and inclusion in both our organization and in our activities," said Marco Bizzarri, president and CEO of Gucci, in a statement. "In the last days we have conducted a thorough review of the circumstances that led to this and have also engaged with all of our stakeholders, most especially our employees and leaders of the African American community, in order to determine immediate actions that will bring greater diversity to key functions in our corporate and regional offices, along with greater cultural awareness throughout our worldwide organization to avoid similar situations occurring in the future."

Inclusive initiatives

Following the sweater incident, Gucci met with brand friend Dapper Dan to develop a plan to combat unintended cultural oversights.

"I am particularly grateful to Dapper Dan for the role he has played in bringing community leaders together to offer us their counsel at this time," Mr. Bizzarri said. "The initiatives we are announcing today represent the first phase of what will become a new systematic long-term plan of action to guarantee that diversity and inclusion are organic in everything we do."

Gucci is beginning with four initiatives, focused on how it hires talent and global education.

The brand will be hiring directors for diversity and inclusion at both a regional and global level, who will oversee the company's inclusivity and focus on its recruitment practices. The global head of diversity will be based in New York, and will report to the chief people officer.

Gucci is currently looking for a candidate to take on the newly created role, which will be part of its executive management committee.



Gucci-Dapper Dan puts a branded touch on Dapper Dan's eclectic style. Image courtesy of Gucci

At the collegiate level, Gucci will work with fashion schools to develop a 12-month program for underrepresented talents. The Multi-Cultural Design Scholarship Program will lead to employment opportunities at Gucci after the year.

Gucci is also adding an international perspective to its design team by hiring five talents from around the world to work out of Rome. These individuals will be chosen by creative director Alessandro Michele, and will be mentored by an existing team member.

The company will also work to feed talent from international offices to its Rome headquarters. Similarly to the designers, these individuals will be mentored by existing Gucci headquarter staff.

In May, Gucci will launch a global program for its 18,000 employees to make itself more inclusive as a workplace and raise awareness of unconscious cultural biases. The company will also launch a new training program for new hires focused on diversity.

Gucci is not alone in taking steps to up diversity and inclusion.

Following repercussions of a product many deemed as racist, Italian fashion label Prada is similarly spotlighting diversity and inclusion in a new program, as many of its peers attempt to navigate similar controversies.

A recent unfortunate trend in the high-fashion world has seen labels facing backlash due to products that members of the public say resemble blackface. These brands are often missing the mark with items viewed as racist, and it could be because of a lack of diversity within the company ([see story](#)).