

ADVERTISING

Jimmy Choo: Mellon departure may force redefinition of footwear brand

November 15, 2011



By RACHEL LAMB

Following the abrupt departure of Jimmy Choo cofounder and creative officer Tamara Mellon and CEO Joshua Shulman, the footwear giant's success and brand reputation will rely solely on their successors.

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Not only did Ms. Mellon serve as the brains and creative behind the brand, she was also seen as a brand ambassadress and even posed in ads for the recently-launched Jimmy Choo fragrance. Although the reason for the resignations are not concrete, many reports suggest that Ms. Mellon and Mr. Shulman's leaving likely has to do with Jimmy Choo's buyout by famed footwear conglomerate Labelux in May.

"The bigger question for Jimmy Choo is not the departure of Tamara Mellon, but how the new owner of the brand Labelux will manage the brand," said Pam Danziger, president of [Unity Marketing](#), Stephens, PA.

"The company's stated goal for the brand is to accelerate growth," she said. "As a luxury brand, that growth needs to be carefully managed.

"In the current economy, we are seeing the dividing line between mass and class blurring," she said. "It may not be in the best interest of the luxe-leaning Jimmy Choo

brand to become too popular among the masses in the interest of stimulating fast growth.”

Named after a Malaysian shoemaker, **Jimmy Choo** competes with footwear brands such as Manolo Blahnik and Christian Louboutin. The company has changed hands several times in the past decade.

Big shoes to fill

Ms. Mellon has been the creative director and cofounder at **Jimmy Choo** for 15 years. She is slated to leave at the end of this month.

Jimmy Choo CEO Mr. Schulman has been with the brand for five years. He plans to stay on until early 2012 for a “transitional period,” according to a report from New York Magazine’s The Cut.

Since Ms. Mellon has attached herself so personally to the brand, it may be difficult for consumers to accept a new spokesperson for Jimmy Choo.

“I think that some of the main challenges would be redefining the brand,” said Courtney Albert, consultant on marketing and branding at Parker Avery, Atlanta. “Mellon was the face of the brand and a lot of women bought into not only Jimmy Choo, but her lifestyle and the kind of woman she exemplifies.”

A more pressing matter, however, is bringing the brand back to the luxe label that it once was.

“The brand did very well financially and was successful, but brand equity-wise it is not on the same level as it was early-on,” she said.

Heeling touch

To bring Jimmy Choo back to its original luxe, the executives at Labelux have their hands full.

“I think it’s unfortunate to lose such high-performance executives at a critical transition time because they are the creators of brand culture,” said Milton Pedraza, CEO of the Luxury Institute, New York.

One of the cornerstones of the luxury industry is, of course, customer service.

The brand’s greatest opportunity is creating a customer-centric culture that is measurable, per Mr. Pedraza.

Another kind of marketing may also help Jimmy Choo reinvent itself with a new face and as a new company.

“I think that with the right marketing, it can overcome this bump because for a long time people didn’t know that there even was a Jimmy Choo and didn’t know the real story,” Parker Avery’s Ms. Albert said.

“I don’t necessarily think that her departure will crumble the brand, but they’ll have to take a series of strategic initiatives to build upon what she created,” she said.

Final Take

Courtney Albert, consultant on marketing and branding for Parker Avery, Atlanta

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