

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

What can LVMH learn from Fenty's fashion missteps?

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Rihanna is the founder, CEO and artistic director of LVMH-owned Fenty. Image credit: Fenty

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LVMH-owned fashion label Fenty is going dormant after a promising start fizzled in a challenging luxury climate.

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First reported by *Women's Wear Daily*, it was revealed on Feb. 10 that LVMH will be putting the ready-to-wear label "on hold" and instead focus on Fenty's makeup, skincare and lingerie lines ([see story](#)). It is a rare move by LVMH Mot Hennessy Louis Vuitton, the world's largest luxury group, and indicative of Fenty's inability to effectively market and position itself in the realm of high-end fashion.

"Fenty skincare, makeup and lingerie have evolved around a very clear message: inclusivity," said Thoma Serdari, director of fashion and luxury MBA and professor at *NYU Stern*, New York. "This is very well articulated primarily because it shaped the product of the brand, then the experience and finally the messaging in that exact sequence.

"Fenty fashion was an extension of Rihanna's beliefs, but it offered a product that was not necessarily very well-differentiated while the pricing made it inaccessible for the audience that follows the celebrity creator," she said. "I think what we observed here was a mismatch of strategies and customer segments."

Fenty in many forms

In May 2019, LVMH launched a new luxury house with Robyn Rihanna Fenty in an expansion of its relationship with the pop star, more commonly known as Rihanna. The conglomerate had already been working with Rihanna on a makeup line, Fenty Beauty, through its beauty subsidiary Kendo.

Fenty was the first LVMH brand started from scratch by the conglomerate, which has a reputation for aggressive acquisitions, since Christian Lacroix in 1987. Rihanna also became the first woman of color to lead an LVMH brand ([see story](#)).

While Fenty Beauty has had strong sales since its launch in 2017 eventually serving as a launchpad for the skincare brand Fenty Skin the fashion house struggled to establish a clear identity after its debut. Fenty designs included apparel, accessories and footwear.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Fenty's bricks-and-mortar presence was fairly limited, despite many luxury

buyers preferring to purchase products in-store. Fenty provided limited opportunities for in-store shopping, opting for temporary pop-ups and a digital-first strategy of frequent product drops ([see story](#)).



Fenty pop-up at Bergdorf Goodman before the pandemic. Image credit: Fenty

In a fairly recent attempt to grow its global customer base, Fenty entered an exclusive partnership with online retailer Farfetch in July 2020 ([see story](#)).

Additionally, despite its digital-first business model and youthful designs, the fashion label's social media presence was not as robust as its beauty and skincare counterparts. Savage X Fenty, the lingerie label owned by Rihanna and Techstyle Fashion Group, also has a strong social media strategy.

"Both Savage X Fenty and Fenty Beauty have grown beyond their initial offerings, have had events pre-COVID as well as have an active social presence as we have all been navigating the global pandemic," said Kimmie Smith, cofounder and creative director of [Athleisure Mag](#), New York. "In terms of the luxury line with LVMH, the presence of this brand doesn't seem to be the same.

"In looking at native advertising, press mentions, etc., this luxury line is not really a brand that seems to have been put in front of people's screens," she said.

While Fenty Beauty and Fenty Skin have an approximate 768,000 and 18,100 followers on TikTok, respectively, the fashion house did not have an official account. Fenty's fashion Instagram account, which boasts 1 million followers, is also less active than the accounts belonging to the other brands in the Fenty lineup, including the lingerie label.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Rihanna promoted a new Fenty Skin product on Instagram

Fenty's luxury price point, though lower than LVMH's Louis Vuitton and Dior, may have been another obstacle to its success. While Rihanna has broad appeal the Grammy Award-winning singer has 90.8 million Instagram followers Fenty Beauty and Fenty Skin are more accessible, with prices in line with other prestige brands.

Meanwhile, Fenty's ecommerce site, which is expected to shutter in the coming weeks, is currently selling a magenta long sleeve tulle T-shirt for \$300. A Savage x Fenty lavender soft mesh long-sleeve open-back teddy retails for \$29.98 for VIP members and \$74.95 for non-members.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have sealed the fate of the fashion label. LVMH's 2020 revenues fell by 17 percent after a record 2019, and losses would have been worse if not for the resilience of fashion and a strong recovery in China.

However, Fenty had a limited presence in the Chinese market. LVMH's annual revenue report only mentioned the Fenty brand once, acknowledging a "very promising start" to the skincare line ([see story](#)).

Fenty forward

With LVMH only confirming that Fenty's ready-to-wear line is paused, there remains the possibility that the fashion house is relaunched in the future. The group has revived dormant brands in the past, as it did with Patou in 2018 ([see story](#)).

If the fashion house is to one day return, Fenty may have to reconsider how it presents its branding. Younger affluents, its target demographic, are reportedly seeking brand presence on social media, short and eye-catching content and brands that reflect consumers' values.

"I think that looking at putting the key pieces forward through ads and social media would just be a great idea in order to see what movement that they can create with existing product that they still have available," Athlesiure Mag's Ms. Smith said. "I think that regardless of success of Fenty's luxury line, we are living in a crucial moment and reckoning where luxury brands understand that they need to incorporate Black voices and faces within their lines not as a trend but as a vital representation."

Accelerated by the global pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, diversification of businesses and the amplification of marginalized voices have become a top priority for businesses and consumers ([see story](#)). In fact, Fenty Beauty was widely praised for its inclusivity, launching with a staggering 40 shades of foundation.

"[LVMH and Fenty] need to reexamine their strategy," NYU's Ms. Serdari said. "The message is still very strong and I believe LVMH shows dedication to forward-thinking by supporting diversity and inclusivity, but from a creative point of view, the brand needs to rethink its DNA, match it with the correct customer segment and then adjust the pricing strategy."