



High-End Fashion's Dirty Secret

Would you ever buy a product from a luxury fashion brand?

Why do you think that people are happy to pay thousands of dollars for a handbag when a much cheaper one would serve the same purpose?

What happens to a handbag that no one buys? Does it quietly wait for a second chance on a **bargain** discount shelf, or perhaps find a new owner through charity? In the luxury fashion world, the answer can often be far more shocking. In a recent TikTok video, it was revealed that American luxury fashion brand “Coach” had slashed (cut with a knife) hundreds of unsold handbags to **prevent** them from being resold or donated.





The TikTok video **drew attention to** a strategy **adopted** by many brands across the industry. In 2017, a New York resident found hundreds of Nike sneakers and t-shirts behind its biggest store, all of which had been cut with a knife, even though they all appeared to be in perfectly good condition.



So why does this wasteful practice **take place**, and why don't companies simply donate or re-sell unused stock at a discount? Well, the answer lies in branding. According to **high-end** fashion experts, selling unwanted handbags or dresses as **bargains** at such low prices risks damaging the luxury brand image. Imagine seeing a heavily discounted Gucci bag on a discount shelf — this lowers the brand's status and makes it appear ordinary.

A person is holding a large, full shopping bag with the iconic Burberry plaid pattern. The bag is yellow and tan with red and black lines. The person is wearing a red jacket and a yellow scarf. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a store interior.

Burberry's Shocking Statistics

In 2018, Burberry burned nearly \$37.8 million worth of unsold clothes. Experts believe that Burberry did this to maintain a level of **scarcity** for its products: the more **scarce** (or rare) the item is, the more valuable it is for high-end consumers.

Many luxury brands **buy into** the "status theory" of fashion, which states:

*Fashion is **adopted** by those at the highest levels of society to **differentiate themselves** from ordinary people.*

Therefore, **high-end** brands believe that solid **brand positioning** and **scarcity** are extremely important for their survival.





Some **mid-range** and **low-end** brands **buy into** a different theory of fashion. These brands see fashion as an expression of the times, a desire to use clothing to **convey** the culture and values of the era. This, however, still does not save unused stock from **ending up** in the flames. Times change so quickly that there is often a lot of unsold stock at the end of every season. H&M has been accused of destroying 12 tonnes of clothes per year as the cheapest way to clear space for the next wave of merchandise.

So, is anything being done to **prevent** this unethical practice from continuing? Due to changes in consumer attitudes and a greater focus on sustainability, companies like Burberry have been forced to stop destroying unsold goods completely. In 2022 France completely banned the destruction of unsold clothing. Thanks to consumers' higher ethical standards, burning unused stock may now be more **detrimental** to a brand's luxury image than selling old items at a discount.



Based on the context of the presentation, can you match the phrases in the box to the definitions listed below? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the form of the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.



a bargain

to prevent

to draw attention

to adopt

to take place

high-end

mid-range

scarce

to buy into

to convey

to differentiate ourselves

detrimental

to end up

1. To begin to use a plan or way of doing something:

"We should _____ a new sales strategy to reach more clients."

"Other companies _____ digital tools faster than we do."

2. In the middle, not cheap and not luxury: -----

"Our _____ products sell best because they balance quality and price."

"We should launch a _____ version to attract more customers."

3. To agree with and support an idea, brand, or plan:

"If the team doesn't _____ the new system, it won't work."

"Investors need to _____ our long-term vision."

4. Hard to find or not enough: -----

"Good designers are _____, so we must pay higher salaries."

"Money is really _____ at the moment, so let's focus on priorities."



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5. To stop someone from taking an action:

"Clear rules ----- staff from making expensive mistakes."

"We need strong systems to ----- hackers from entering."

6. Expensive and top quality: -----

"We want to market this product to ----- clients."

"----- phones give us higher profit margins."

7. To show or communicate a message: -----

"Our brand should ----- trust and reliability."

"The design must ----- a modern, clean image."

8. To finally be in a place or situation: -----

"If we don't plan well, we could ----- losing money."

"With these delays, we might ----- missing the deadline."



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9. Causing harm or a bad effect: _____

"Poor planning is _____ to our success."

"Too much stress is _____ to employee performance."

10. Something very cheap for the value it gives:

"This software was a _____ at half the usual cost."

"The supplier's offer is a _____ compared to others."

11. To make people notice something: _____

"We need ads that _____ to our new product."

"That design will _____ at the trade fair."

12. To show how we are different from others:

"We must _____ through better service."

"Good branding helps us _____ in the market."

13. To happen at a certain time or location:

"The meeting will _____ at 10 a.m. in the main room."

Comprehension: Can you answer the questions below about the text?

Based on the whole article, what are 3 reasons why clothing brands sometimes destroy unused stock?

What are 2 contrasting theories of fashion given in the article?

Based on the context of the article, what do you think that the term “brand positioning” means in paragraph 5?

What impression do we get in the article about the future of this unethical practice?

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words and phrases from the box below? You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence.

high-end (x2)

brand positioning

prevent

adopt

conveying

differentiate

detrimental

end up

A Luxury Cosmetic Brand's Big Mistake

A few years ago, the decision was made to put our _____ cosmetics brand into regular drugstores in order to boost sales. We believe that this was a big mistake which has completely damaged our luxury brand image and has had a _____ effect on our sales in _____ stores last year.

As a result, our _____ is no longer clear to consumers, and we are _____ an unclear image for our customers. If this continues, then sales could continue to fall and we could _____ going bankrupt.

However, we believe that the situation can be changed if we _____ a strategy to remove our products from regular drugstores as soon as possible. I strongly believe that this will _____ any further damage to our reputation, at least to some extent. We will then launch a new luxury product in order to _____ ourselves once again from the mass market.