

## Target's Missoni: More flash than cash?

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Target Corp. pulled a Houdini with its Missoni.

After months of careful hyping, the Minneapolis-based retailer finally debuted its limited edition Missoni collection last week only to watch frenzied customers clean out most of its inventory in less than a day.

Normally, that would be a good thing. But Target designed the collection to run until late October, a nice lead up to the key holiday shopping season. With its Missoni merchandise now only available in memory and on eBay, Target faces a vacuum of sorts that will be difficult to fill before Christmas.

The episode raises the question: What benefit did Target receive from Missoni?

"It reinforced our brand positioning in the marketplace, which is to expect more," said Target spokesman Joshua Thomas, referring to the company's motto of "Expect More, Pay Less." "We invented this space."

Others feel Target gained some humility. For example, selling Missoni through [Target.com](http://Target.com) deprived stores of valuable inventory, some

analysts say, and called into question the reliability of its relaunched website.

"What good came out of it was a little bit of learning," said Judith Russell, editor of the Robin Report, a newsletter that tracks the retail industry. "It was a mistake putting Missoni merchandise online. This was all about creating excitement for shoppers" in the stores.

Over the past year, as the country's economic recovery began to falter, Target's sales growth has been driven not by its trademark fashion and home sensibilities but rather by generic consumables like cereal, toothpaste and shampoo. In other words, the low-price stuff you would expect to find at a Wal-Mart.

Target's partnership with Missoni, a venerable Italian brand, was meant to remind recession-wary consumers of what Target does best: high concept, stylistic merchandising for the masses. In fact, Thomas noted that Target, which boasts one of the largest design houses in the country, designed most of the 400-piece, 1960s inspired collection, with advice from family stalwarts Margherita Maccapani Missoni and Angela Missoni. The collection included everything from sweaters and ties to furniture and bicycles.

Target launched a full-throttled marketing campaign to promote Missoni, including a pop-up store and a 25-foot Italian doll named Little Marina in Manhattan during New York's Fashion Week. Even celebrities such as singer Jessica Simpson and

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actress Jessica Alba craved some Missoni.

"I dreamt about the Missoni 4 Target bike last night...wonder if that was a premonition :) Maybe @cash\_warren is going to get it 4 me?!?" Alba tweeted on Sept. 8, a declaration Target happily retweeted.

Donna Reamy, an associate professor and interim chair of the fashion design and merchandising department at Virginia Commonwealth University, said Target created the right conditions for Missoni mania.

First, Target's deal with Missoni, which also has a line at the high-end department store Neiman Marcus, meant that mass consumers would get an affordable crack at a "luxury brand, even it's from Target," she said.

Second of all, the popularity of Twitter and YouTube means that trends from Fashion Week that traditionally would have taken months to reach the rest of the country now are instantaneous, she said.

When Target launched the collection Tuesday, the response was "unprecedented," Target's Thomas said. Lines snaked around Target stores. [Target.com](http://Target.com) crashed for hours.

"It was very Black Fridayish," Thomas said. Only instead of consumers snapping one or two items, they were loading carts with merchandise throughout the entire collection, he said.

But success comes with a price. [Target.com](http://Target.com)'s problems were an embarrassment -- especially since Target had just debuted its revamped website a few weeks earlier, promising, among other things, expedited and easy checkout. Online shoppers who already had Missoni merchandise in their queue were left high and dry.

More embarrassing was the fact that Target soon had nothing left to sell. While Target purposely limited the size of the collection to whip up demand, the strategic purpose of the Missoni line was to drive shoppers to the store and create momentum for the holiday shopping season, said Carol Spieckerman, president of newmarketbuilders, a retail strategy firm in Bentonville, Ark.

But the retailer failed to devise a campaign that had continuity, a way to exploit the Missoni craze long after the last items flew off the shelves, which happened to be the first day of the launch, she said. In other words, Missoni was more flash than cash.

As a result, Target has a big hole to fill heading into the uncertain holiday shopping season, Spieckerman said.

Thomas of Target said the retailer will not order more Missoni goods, though he did not rule out the possibility that the retailer might work with the Italian designer again. In the meantime, Target plans to roll out three more limited edition collections over the remainder of the year, including Josie Natori loungewear and lingerie, Albertus Swanepoel hats and Dana Kellin jewelry.

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But those lines have Missoni's tough act to follow.

"Target is probably scrambling," Reamy of Virginia Commonwealth University said. "They have to do something for the consumer."

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