

# COSMO *girl!*

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## Shirts or Skins?



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Abercrombie and Fitch is an American retailer that produces casual wear in the United States and international markets. United Colors of Benetton is present in 120 countries and sells apparel with a strong Italian character whose style, quality, and passion are clearly represented by its brands. When comparing the two brands, their marketing tactics are complete opposites. Many people have criticized Abercrombie and Fitch for their advertising and marketing techniques claiming that they include nude and sexually suggestive photos. However, their techniques have been successful because consumers buy their clothing. A&F made a profit of \$25.1 million between January and April 2011. If they “played it safe” and used tactics similar to United Colors of Benetton, they would not be a highly competitive company in the fashion industry.

Abercrombie and Fitch relies heavily on image to sell their “casual luxury” clothing. From the moment consumers walk into the store they see good-looking women with nice bodies dressed with a casual style. Women are required to dress with season-appropriate clothing, cannot wear make up, and have to look clean and presentable. In an interview conducted with Connor Berrier, he says, “employees have to maintain an image that represents the casual luxury lifestyle brand.” The men, although fully clothed, look like they appear right out of a magazine with perfect hair and a muscular build. After taking a few steps into the store, your eyes are drawn to photographs of models who are half-naked. What is Abercrombie and Fitch trying to sell with pictures of models who are barely wearing A&F clothing?

Brand marketing is an important tactic that Abercrombie and Fitch use. They advertise their brand name because name has power. The words “Abercrombie and Fitch” have become important to teenagers, causing them to wear clothing almost exclusively A&F clothing in an attempt to be popular. Teens prominently display the name by even covering books with A&F bags. Although the clothing is simple, the feeling of conformity and belonging with others adds to its popularity. People buy into the stereotype that if they wear a shirt that says, “Abercrombie

and Fitch,” they will look a certain way. A&F uses brand marketing to set themselves apart from other clothing lines. If they changed their advertising to include color photography, multi-ethnic models, and different body types, it wouldn’t be Abercrombie & Fitch. There aren’t many other companies who use male models with washboard abs and portray sexiness. Consumers also have brand loyalty and keep returning to buy their clothing. Since A&F has a popular reputation, shopping doesn’t stop with one T-shirt.





Although people may think that it is unethical to use nude photography and image to sell a product, it works. Teens buy into their tactics and that's why they wear A&F clothing. Teens buy their clothing because it looks nice, but in reality they don't say to themselves, "I'm going to look as sexy as the girl in the magazine if I buy that blouse." They buy A&F clothing because others wear it.

Abercrombie and Fitch has a specific tab on their website labeled "diversity." It is ironic that they include this because the statements they provide aren't clearly visible in stores. It says, "Diversity and inclusion are key to our organization's success. We are determined to have a diverse culture, throughout our organization, that benefits from the perspectives of each individual." They claim that their in-store workforce is 50.22%

people of color, in-store models are 48.44% people of color, and in-store managers-in-training are 41.04% people of color. It is hard to believe because consumers don't see this diversity in stores. What they don't realize is that Asians, Filipinos, Latinos, and Mexicans don't greet people, but work in the stock room. On the diversity web page, there is a collage of diverse photos. These photos are not sexy, but portray people with different ethnicities and a natural smile on their face. Abercrombie and Fitch chose to include these photos only on this page for a reason. If they use these in advertisements, their image will change. Maintaining a constant image is necessary because it is easily identifiable by consumers.



"I'm going to look as sexy as the girl in the magazine if I buy that blouse."





color, diversity, playful



monotone, uniform, sensual







In contrast, United Colors of Benetton is a successful company whose tactics are the exact opposite of Abercrombie and Fitch. In the 80's Benetton was the Abercrombie and Fitch. They use color in advertising and multi-ethnic models. The name "United Colors of Benetton" clearly implies diversity. Instead of using sexy photos, the photography is more natural and playful. It is common to see women, men, and children interacting. It portrays a realistic lifestyle that people can achieve by wearing their clothing. Models are actually wearing clothing that promotes their company compared to A&F, whose models are almost naked. Female and male models may appeal to both sexes, unlike A&F. Benetton also represents high fashion in contrast with A&F, which has a casual look. Their advertising is different because their target market isn't limited to teenage girls and boys. They also target older crowds and young children. Benetton's photography also encompasses a model's full body to show personal identity. This is the opposite of Abercrombie and Fitch, who cuts off faces from photos. By taking away facial identity, Abercrombie enforces its reliance on body image.





If A&F adopted similar marketing techniques as Benetton, they would lose their competitiveness in an industry that is built around competition. If they were more diverse, consumers wouldn't be able to immediately recognize one of their ads. Using black and white is one of their trademarks, and it would change their appeal if they included color photography. A&F chose these tactics for a purpose, which is to set themselves apart from other clothing companies. It's all a part of brand marketing.



Using black and white is one of their trademarks



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