

Abercrombie Wants Off ‘Jersey Shore’ (Wink-Wink)

By **STEPHANIE CLIFFORD**

Brands have pursued product placement for years, cutting deals to get sodas and sports cars in movies and on television. Some have even insisted on the opposite, having their logos and labels blurred by the camera when associated with the bad guy, for instance.

Now Abercrombie & Fitch is doing one better: it has offered to pay the cast members of the trashy-and-proud [MTV](#) reality show “Jersey Shore” never to wear its clothes on air. “This association is contrary to the aspirational nature of our brand, and may be distressing to many of our fans,” the company said in a [news release](#).

Michael S. Jeffries, Abercrombie’s chairman and chief executive, said on Wednesday that the company was “having a lot of fun” with the proposed payoff, which analysts and MTV characterized as a publicity stunt — even if a pretty good one for a slow day in August.

Drew Kerr, a public relations consultant in New York, said the move reminded him of Larry Flynt [offering famous people millions](#) to pose for Hustler. “It’s offering something publicly that you know is never going to happen, but you do it because it’s just made for the press,” he said.

In a news release with the title “Abercrombie & Fitch Proposes a Win-Win Situation,” the company said on Tuesday that it had become concerned after noticing that a cast member, [Mike Sorrentino](#), known as “the Situation,” had taken to wearing its clothes. Mr. Sorrentino’s nickname is a reference to his six-pack abs.

It is hard to imagine that Abercrombie’s fans were too distressed — they would probably be more upset if their parents started wearing the clothes. After all, Abercrombie is a mass-market brand that goes after teenagers and is not shy about controversy — when it opened its Paris store earlier this year, it paraded shirtless models along the Champs-Élysées before the police shut the show down.

Jordan Yospe, a lawyer who [handles product-placement deals](#) in movies and television shows, said that if Abercrombie were serious about keeping its clothing off the Situation, it would have pursued legal options rather than offering him money.

“They could try to prevent the series from airing their intellectual property without their permission,” said Mr. Yospe, a lawyer at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips in Los Angeles. Logos and labels fall under fair-use law, he said, and shows have to get approval from the owner of the intellectual property to use them.

That's why on so many low-end reality shows, brands are often blurred, Mr. Yospe said — the shows either could not or did not try to get approval. Abercrombie “could say, ‘Blur ’em,’ ” if they really wanted to sever the association, Mr. Yospe said.

However, in issuing a news release instead, Abercrombie seemed pleased to fan the flames. And MTV played along on Wednesday. “It’s a clever P.R. stunt, and we’d love to work with them on other ways they can leverage ‘Jersey Shore’ to reach the largest youth audience on television,” it said in an e-mail.

Mr. Kerr, the public relations consultant, said the episode echoed one last year on the same show, when [rumors about product placement](#) surrounded Mr. Sorrentino’s cast mate Nicole Polizzi, known as “Snooki,” a brunette with voluminous hair who [likes to wear](#) tiny leopard-print dresses. The contention, never confirmed but given media attention nonetheless, was that luxury handbag companies were supplying Snooki with rival brands’ purses so that theirs would not be associated with her.

Abercrombie [reported quarterly earnings](#) on Wednesday, and its executives seemed rather pleased with their Situation situation in a conference call with Wall Street analysts.

“Is no one going to ask about the Situation?” Mr. Jeffries, the chief executive, asked after a series of questions about Abercrombie’s finances and strategy.

Finally, an analyst did, and Mr. Jeffries explained the background.

“Last Friday morning, I was with a group of people here and someone came up and said, ‘Mike, I have terrible, terrible news for you. Last night on “Jersey Shore,” the Situation had A.& F. product on.’ We all said, ‘Oh! That’s terrible! What are we going to do about it?’ And the group kind of came up with the solution: Let’s pay them not to wear our product.”

John D. Morris, an analyst with BMO Capital Markets, said the move was a smart one because it left an optimistic tone to Abercrombie’s conference call.

“This puts the name Abercrombie top of mind during the all-important back-to-school season,” he said. He added that while Abercrombie’s quarterly results beat forecasts, executives’ caution about the rest of the year seemed worrisome. “Our take was, if they were so concerned about the current state of business, would they be bringing up something as grave as the Situation?” Mr. Morris said.

Still, Abercrombie’s stock fell more than 8 percent on Wednesday, dropping \$6.15 a share to close at \$64.87.