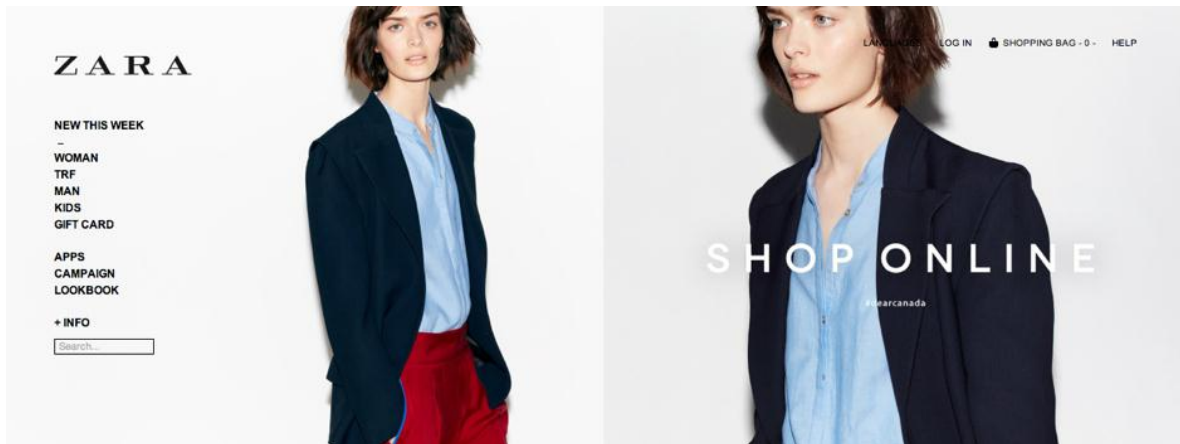


THE GENTEEL

From Zara, With Love

by Justine Iaboni | Posted March 7, 2013

Topics: #DearCanada, Alexander Liang, amancio ortega, Bershka, bulletin, canada, Draw a Dot, ecommerce, Forbes billionaires, gracie carroll, Inditex Group, Kenton Magazine, La Coruna, marcus kan, marketing, Massimo Dutti, New York Times, Oysha, public relations, Pull & Bear, retail, Shopping, spain, Stradivarius, Suzy Hansen, Zara, Zara Home, Zara.com



Zara, the largest fashion retailer in the world, has finally launched e-commerce in Canada with little more than a sweet nothings letter addressed to the nation, #DearCanada, and gift cards delivered to select bloggers allowing them to pre-shop the site before going live on March 6, 2013.

For the world's largest retailer, Zara keeps an incredibly low profile, with a communications philosophy that can be described as letting the clothes speak for themselves. With the company's founder, Amancio Ortega, sitting pretty in third place on Forbes billionaire list, it would appear the philosophy is working just fine.

The fast fashion brand is a branch of Ortega's parent company, Inditex Group, which owns Zara, Zara Home, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Oysho, Stradivarius, Pull &

Bear and Uterqüe. For the first nine months of 2012, Inditex reported a 17 per cent year-on-year increase in net sales to 11.362 million euros. Hardly a trifle for a company that, judging by the tidbits of information we've received about the Canadian e-commerce launch, doesn't do much PR. Ortega himself grants interviews once in a blue moon, keeping a low profile, and imbuing his brands with a similar principle - which has continued even after the business mogul stepped down as chairman in 2011.

In spite of marinating in the shadows, what Inditex has revealed to the public can only be described as a flawless business approach to garment production and retail. Nestled away in La Coruña, a sort of quiescent beach town in Northern Spain, is the Inditex headquarters where all the 840 million garments are designed, produced and shipped every year to its 5,900 stores worldwide, as reported by Suzy Hansen in the *New York Times* last year.



Source: torontoisfashion.com.

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Working from home, so to speak, has afforded Intidex an unparalleled merchandise turnover rate. Pieces are shipped from Spain to various stores, clueing in on what local customers want, twice a week. At Zara, the pleated blush pink skirt with scalloped edge in your size could really be here today, gone tomorrow. Merchandise is rarely restocked; instead, stores are replenished with new pieces boasting that fresh off the runway appeal. And if you really must get your hands on it, Canada, you can finally go online.

Among the chosen ones to test-run the Zara online shopping experience is Alexander Liang, editor-in-chief of *Kenton Magazine*. Being stationed in New York City for years, Liang is no neophyte to Zara's online game. "I often go into the store, but can't find items in my size, so being able to order online will be a great way to get those items," Liang tells *The Genteel*, "I also find that the selection varies from store to store, but the online store offers the full collection most of the time."

In store, the runway-inspired items du jour in smaller sizes S and XS get snapped up faster than

you can say crêpe de Chine. *Draw a Dot* creator Marcus Kan notes, "At this current moment, the store has every size in stock and has a lot of different items for purchase." Kan adds, "I just purchased a blazer online and the experience was very pleasant. [...] I think what I like about online store is that I don't have to line up to pay for the items and I am not a big fan of shopping in a crowded environment."

With low odds of size availability and a high likelihood of waiting in line, one wonders why Zara waited so long to launch e-commerce in Canada. Over twenty brick and mortar stores nation-wide have been servicing the country's fashionistas for over a decade since the first store opened in the Place Montreal Trust Shopping Centre in 1999.

Canada is the 22nd country to join the Zara network, along with America, Japan, China and 18 European countries, which were all equipped with e-commerce, in some cases, much earlier. Gracie Carroll of *GracieCarroll.com*, who uses *Zara.com* as a form of window shopping suggests that "e-commerce in Canada is very behind when it comes to shopping online in comparison to the States and parts of Europe. It's not that companies in Canada aren't online, but Canadians shop online a lot less."

But the tide doth change. I, for one, woke up early this morning to make my first purchase at *Zara.com*, toasty coffee in hand, before rushing off to work. The return policy is super flexible; should my faded black bermuda cut-offs not fit me exactly right, I can drop them off at a Zara store near me, or back in the mail. I'll never have to sift and wrestle my way through those infamous Zara clothes racks, hangers gouging my palms, praying to the fashion gods for the last sweater to be a size 2 - and there is no need to advertise what's so deliciously fabulous about that!



Gift cards sent to select bloggers across Canada.
Source: mrwillwong.com.