

Benetton, for. the italy
based group is well



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Benetton, the world famous clothing producer, once again dives into social issues that the United States may not be ready for. The Italy based group is well known for their shocking world issue advertisements that only bear the company logo. In fact, Benetton's advertisements traditionally do not feature the clothes it sells; only the issues play the lead role. After years of controversy over ads such as AIDS, war, interracial relationships, and priests kissing nuns, it may be time for Benetton to campaign about something other than controversial social issues, like clothes. On January 1, 2000, Benetton's new advertising campaign wasn't about sweaters or pants, but about convicted murderers that are on death row. The death row ads feature portraits of American death row inmates in prison uniforms with the slogan Sentenced to Death. The ads give the inmates name, date of birth, crime, and expected method of execution.

Within the campaign, inmates also talk about topics ranging from their childhood to their dreams, everything except their victims. According to CNN, victims rights advocates are outraged as well as are the individuals that lost loved ones to the profiled inmates. Once again, Benetton is faced with another controversy that could perhaps worsen their already poor US market share. According to the New York Stock Exchange, where The Benetton Group is publicly traded, it seems that the company has lost over ten dollars per share since their peak of 50 15/16 in January. This decrease could be attributed to many things, but perhaps the most significant was the February announcement that Sears would immediately pull Benetton designed clothes from all 400 of its stores that had been selling the Benetton USA line.

The Benetton USA line was specifically designed for Sears when the two companies joined last summer to introduce a new line of juniors, kids, and mens apparel. Troubled by the campaign, Sears renegotiated its contract with Benetton to gain the right to preview future Benetton ad campaigns. A revised clause in the contract also gave Sears the ability to withdraw from the deal without penalty if the two parties were unable to agree on future campaigns, according to CNN. Regardless of these changes, the controversy was too significant for Sears to ignore due to the hundreds of consumer complaints that poured into the store after the campaign released.

According to the February 21, 2000 article in Advertising Age, a Sears spokesman said the chain allied itself with Benetton because We thought they were past that and had come to a point where they were interested in selling merchandise. The whole episode is tragic, for the victims, for Sears and for Benetton. However, Sears is not the only one taking action against the company. According to CNN, it was announced on February 10, 2000 that the state of Missouri was suing Benetton for ads featuring death row inmates that reside in Missouri prisons. Missouri claims that the company deceived the state when it used the death row inmates as part of its ad campaign. The state thought the inmates were being interviewed for a project sponsored by the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

In addition, according to the February 19, 2000 article in The Economist, a Benetton spokesperson in New York admitted that payment was made to two inmates for the rights to their likeness. The state accuses Benetton of fraudulent misrepresentation, trespass by deceit and trespass by exceeding the scope of consent. Although the problems with Sears and Missouri could

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have significantly decreased the overall value of Benetton, the fact remains that consumers ultimately decide the fate of a company by whether or not they shop there. It seems that sources such as CNN, Wall Street Journal, and Advertising Age, among others, have touched upon US consumer reactions to the new ad campaign. Overall, it is not being accepted well in the United States and an already weak market will continue to weaken as long as Benetton refuses to change its US advertising techniques. According to the Washington Post, Benetton is standing by its campaign.

In fact, its US director of communications stated, Once again, its very hard for people to see what were doing and understand that its