

# Luxury & Fashion

## 2020

Contributing editors

Meryl Bernstein and Sahira Khwaja



**Publisher**

Edward Costelloe  
edward.costelloe@lbresearch.com

**Subscriptions**

Claire Bagnall  
claire.bagnall@lbresearch.com

**Senior business development manager**

Adam Sargent  
adam.sargent@gettingthedelthrough.com

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**Meryl Bernstein and Sahira Khwaja**  
Hogan Lovells

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Lexology Getting The Deal Through is delighted to publish the first edition of *Luxury & Fashion*, which is available in print and online at [www.lexology.com/gtdt](http://www.lexology.com/gtdt).

Lexology Getting The Deal Through provides international expert analysis in key areas of law, practice and regulation for corporate counsel, cross-border legal practitioners, and company directors and officers.

Throughout this edition, and following the unique Lexology Getting The Deal Through format, the same key questions are answered by leading practitioners in each of the jurisdictions featured.

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Every effort has been made to cover all matters of concern to readers. However, specific legal advice should always be sought from experienced local advisers.

Lexology Getting The Deal Through gratefully acknowledges the efforts of all the contributors to this volume, who were chosen for their recognised expertise. We also extend special thanks to the contributing editors, Meryl Bernstein and Sahira Khwaja of Hogan Lovells, for their assistance with this volume.

 **LEXOLOGY**  
Getting The Deal Through

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Meryl Bernstein and Sahira Khwaja Hogan Lovells	
<b>Canada</b>	<b>5</b>
Dana Siddle, Lara Nathans, Martha Harrison, Trevor Lawson, Dominic Thérien, Selina Lee-Andersen, Adam Ship, Vincent Yip, Nicolas Desy, Carmen Francis and Michael Scherman McCarthy Tétrault LLP	
<b>China</b>	<b>13</b>
Angell Xi (Minjie) Jingtian & Gongcheng	
<b>France</b>	<b>24</b>
Annabelle Gauberti Crefovi	
<b>Germany</b>	<b>35</b>
Uwe Lueken, Lea Noemi Mackert, Benjamin Karcher, Henriette Picot, Joerg Witting and Niels Lutzhoeft Bird & Bird LLP	
<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>41</b>
Hank Leung Bird & Bird	
<b>Italy</b>	<b>48</b>
Luigi Mansani, Maria Luigia Franceschelli, Marco Berliri, Paola la Gumina, Vanessa Tritto, Vittorio Moresco, Fulvia Astolfi, Massimiliano Masnada, Sabrina Borocci, Eugenia Gambarara, Christian di Mauro, Claudio Pasina and Antonio di Pasquale Hogan Lovells	
<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>55</b>
Manon Rieger-Jansen, Roelien van Neck, Pauline Kuipers, Nina Dorenbosch, Lisette den Butter, Chelsea Gunning, Chloë Baartmans, Goran Danilovic and Marinke Moeliker Bird & Bird LLP	
<b>Portugal</b>	<b>63</b>
Ana Rita Paíño, Margarida Costa Gomes and Inês de Sá Sérvulo & Associados – Sociedade de Advogados, SP, RL	
<b>South Korea</b>	<b>69</b>
Yong-Hoon Cho and Hee Won (Marina) Moon Kim & Chang	
<b>Spain</b>	<b>75</b>
Alex Dolmans, Graciela Martin, Víctor Mella and Constanze Schulte Hogan Lovells	
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>81</b>
Sahira Khwaja, Penelope Thornton, Richard Welfare, Rachael Hunt, Helen Boniface, Rupert Shiers, Graham Poole, Philip Harle, Nicola Fulford, Alex Ford-Cox, Valerie Kenyon, Tania Buckthorp, Nicola Evans, Catherine Lah, Angus Coulter, Matt Giles, Ed Bowyer and Jo Broadbent Hogan Lovells	
<b>United States</b>	<b>89</b>
Meryl Bernstein, Kelly Tubman Hardy, Chandri Navarro, Fabrizio Lolliri, Julia Anne Matheson, Anna Kurian Shaw, Katherine M Bastian, Timothy P Tobin, Steven B Steinborn, Phoebe Wilkinson, Andrew J Lee, Michael E DeLarco and Daniel Petrokas Hogan Lovells	

# Netherlands

**Manon Rieger-Jansen, Roelien van Neck, Pauline Kuipers, Nina Dorenbosch, Lisette den Butter, Chelsea Gunning, Chloë Baartmans, Goran Danilovic and Marinke Moeliker**  
Bird & Bird LLP

## MARKET SPOTLIGHT

### State of the market

- 1 | What is the current state of the luxury fashion market in your jurisdiction?

The Netherlands is home to the European headquarters of several leading international fashion brands, such as Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Patagonia, Karl Lagerfeld, Nike and Asics. Combined with the many Dutch-origin companies also present on the scene – like Scotch and Soda, Suitsupply, G-Star and Hunkemöller – this makes for a vibrant luxury and fashion market in the Netherlands with an international, creative workforce. Amsterdam even prides itself in having the world's highest concentration of denim brands.

In 2017, the value of the apparel market in the Netherlands was already US\$14.5 billion and also the footwear market brings in several billion a year. In 2019, 15 per cent of the fashion retail turnover was achieved through online channels, and this market is still growing steadily with an increasing focus on achieving an omnichannel shopping experience. Also, topics like sustainability, the circular economy and re-commerce are becoming ever more important in the Dutch market. Just like in other countries, 2019 was a turbulent year for fashion companies with a number of bankruptcies and relaunches of smaller and medium-sized Dutch brands. 2020 is expected to bring new challenges of its own.

## MANUFACTURE AND DISTRIBUTION

### Manufacture and supply chain

- 2 | What legal framework governs the development, manufacture and supply chain for fashion goods? What are the usual contractual arrangements for these relationships?

The development, manufacture and supply chain for fashion goods are governed by general commercial and contract law. In the Netherlands, a general freedom of contract applies. However, under Dutch law, any commercial contract is subject to a reasonableness and fairness test. The concept of reasonableness and fairness may, in specific circumstances, set aside or imply certain contract clauses.

The contractual arrangements regarding the development and manufacturing of fashion goods are often included in dedicated development or manufacturing agreements. As regards the supply chain, companies usually sell their products through a network of vertical agreements (e.g., through distribution, franchise and agency agreements).

### Distribution and agency agreements

- 3 | What legal framework governs distribution and agency agreements for fashion goods?

The distribution agreement has no specific statutory basis in Dutch law. Because the distribution agreement is commonly used in the Netherlands, several specific subjects related to distribution relationships – for example, the termination of distribution agreements – have been clarified in case law.

The agency agreement has a statutory basis in Dutch law and is regulated in Title 7.7.4 of the Dutch Civil Code. The relevant legislation is, *inter alia*, based on the EU Directive on the coordination of the laws of the member states relating to self-employed commercial agents (Directive 86/653/EEG).

- 4 | What are the most commonly used distribution and agency structures for fashion goods, and what contractual terms and provisions usually apply?

Agency and distribution agreements for fashion goods are often framework agreements that provide the terms that govern separate purchase agreements or orders.

Agency and distribution agreements for fashion goods are often concluded for a specific territory, such as a country (Netherlands) or a group of countries (Benelux). Agents and distributors are, further, usually appointed on an exclusive or non-exclusive basis.

Relevant contractual terms and provisions to include in agency and distribution agreements for fashion goods are, *inter alia*, stipulations regarding the duration of the relationship, applicable minimum purchasing obligations (subject to competition law requirements), relevant sales targets, marketing efforts, renumeration, recalls, and protection of intellectual property rights.

In addition to the above, it is important to keep in mind the luxury fashion sector specifics when drafting more 'standard' contractual clauses. It will, *inter alia*, be relevant to consider the seasonality of fashion when agreeing on possible (premature) termination options, including notice periods and any termination fees.

### Import and export

- 5 | Do any special import and export rules and restrictions apply to fashion goods?

As a starting point, it is very helpful to assess and determine the correct origin and commodity code of the relevant fashion good being imported or exported. This will enable fashion companies to better identify the applicable rules and restrictions such as whether upon import or export a product needs a permit or stamp under the Convention on International

Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Some examples of import and export rules and restrictions are as follows:

- fashion goods containing certain fur or leather or other parts from endangered species are subject to prohibitions or specific licensing requirements;
- seal-related fashion goods are subject to prohibitions. Seal products entail all products, either processed or unprocessed, deriving or obtained from seals;
- jeans originating from the United States attract additional customs duties upon importation into the EU and need to be taken into account;
- fashion and luxury goods made subject to EU sanction regimes:
  - the EU sanctions against North Korea, prohibiting the sale, supply, transfer or export of luxury goods to North Korea as well as the import, purchase or transfer from North Korea of luxury goods; and
  - fashion goods being regarded as economic resources subject to export prohibition to any EU sanctioned parties.

In practice, it is recommended to gain insight of the import and export rules and restrictions at an early stage in view of being able to apply for and obtain any required licences or certifications enabling business operations and the related supply chain to run smoothly.

#### **Corporate social responsibility and sustainability**

- 6** | What are the requirements and disclosure obligations in relation to corporate social responsibility and sustainability for fashion and luxury brands in your jurisdiction? What due diligence in this regard is advised or required?

Generally, listed companies with more than 500 employees have to report on a number of non-financial aspects in their annual report. Information to be provided on corporate social responsibility should in any event touch on policies relating to (i) environmental, social and personnel matters, (ii) respect for human rights and (iii) the tackling of corruption and bribery. Companies are given a large amount of freedom in their reporting, through mostly non-binding guidelines. Sustainability is more often put as a separate discussion item on the agenda of the general meeting and it is sufficient to include a statement in the management report; a separate, more detailed sustainability report is not mandatory.

- 7** | What occupational health and safety laws should fashion companies be aware of across their supply chains?

The Dutch health and safety laws focus on industrial accidents and occupational diseases (*risque professionnel*) and on sickness illness and absenteeism of workers in general (*risque sociale*). The employer must provide a safe workplace, identify possible hazards and risks, take action where needed and inform employees about the risks and prevention. Furthermore, employers are obliged to report accidents and seek advice from occupational health experts on the risk inventory and assessment. The employer is further obliged to have a contract with an occupational safety and health service or an occupational physician, whose advice or guidance must be sought in case of long-term sickness.

The main Dutch regulations regarding working conditions are:

- the Working Conditions Act, which provides general provisions for employers and employees on how to deal with occupational safety and health; for example, to have a written occupational safety and health policy and a risk inventory;
- the Working Conditions Decree, which covers a wide range of specific occupational health and safety topics, such as provisions on workplaces, dangerous substances, noise, vibrations, etc;

- the Working Conditions Regulation, which contains very specific provisions that are changing relatively fast; for example, the occupational exposure limit for dangerous substances;
- the Major Accidents Decree and Regulation, which deal with legislation in the field of major accidents related to dangerous substances; and
- the Working Hours legislation, covering, *inter alia*, maximum working hours per shift and the obligation to properly register working hours (exemptions apply).

The Labour Inspectorate monitors compliance with occupational safety and health legislation and regulations.

#### **ONLINE RETAIL**

##### **Launch**

- 8** | What legal framework governs the launch of an online fashion marketplace or store?

Online marketplaces and online stores are regulated by e-commerce legislation, primarily included in the Dutch Civil Code. The legislation relevant for online marketplaces or online stores is mostly the Dutch implementation of the relevant EU regulations and directives.

Websites must comply with applicable e-commerce and platform legislation, including (pre-contractual) information obligations, the right of withdrawal, obtaining prior consent of the website user before placing cookies (if needed) and complying with geo-blocking restrictions pertaining to the accessibility of the website by customers that reside in another EU member state. Also, during the sales process, unfair commercial practices towards consumers must be avoided.

Online marketplaces and online stores must, furthermore, comply with applicable contract law, including business-to-consumer contracting legislation.

##### **Sourcing and distribution**

- 9** | How does e-commerce implicate retailers' sourcing and distribution arrangements (or other contractual arrangements) in your jurisdiction?

E-commerce brings the retailers' sourcing and distribution arrangements within the framework of the e-commerce legislation as contained in the Dutch Civil Code. This means, *inter alia*, that retailers must comply with (pre-contractual) information obligations, the right of withdrawal, obtaining prior consent of the website user before placing cookies (if needed) and complying with geo-blocking restrictions pertaining to the accessibility of the website by customers that reside in another EU member state. Furthermore, sometimes a model of 'drop-shipping' is used. This is a form of e-commerce where the merchant, in fact the intermediate party, offers products in its online store that are not in stock. The producer, wholesaler or supplier delivers the products directly to the end user (ie, the customer).

##### **Terms and conditions**

- 10** | What special considerations would you take into account when drafting online terms and conditions for customers when launching an e-commerce website in your jurisdiction?

Online terms and conditions must comply with the Dutch legislation concerning general terms and conditions. This legislation is included in Title 6.5.3 of the Dutch Civil Code and is based on the EU directive on unfair terms in consumer contracts (Directive 93/13/EEG).

Online terms and conditions should not be 'unreasonably onerous' for the customer (i.e., consumers or small and medium-sized

businesses). Whether a clause is unreasonably onerous depends on the circumstances of the specific case. Clauses that are considered unreasonably onerous in all circumstances are included in an exhaustive list (the 'black list'). The Dutch Civil Code also contains a list of clauses that are presumed to be unreasonably onerous for consumers (the 'grey list'). Such clauses are not automatically void, but if found unreasonable in the given circumstances, the clause can be set aside. The relevant articles also regulate the applicability and use of general terms and conditions in contracts with consumers or small to medium businesses.

As mentioned above, traders must provide certain pre-contractual information before the contract is concluded. Some of this information must also be provided to the customer after the purchase has been made. Often, this information is included in the general terms and conditions. Information that should be provided to a customer, inter alia, includes information about the right to withdraw from the contract, without providing reasons, within 14 calendar days from the day the consumer received the goods.

## Tax

### 11 | Are online sales taxed differently than sales in retail stores in your jurisdiction?

For a start, sales in retail stores are taxed with the local value added tax (VAT) rate (currently 21 per cent).

Online sales in the Netherlands where both the seller and the buyer are based in the Netherlands (domestic sales) are taxed with the same VAT rate.

For online sales by buyers in the Netherlands not involving a domestic sale, the VAT rate treatment is based on certain factors, such as where the seller is based (other EU member state or outside the EU) and the location from where the fashion products are being shipped.

For example, online sales from sellers based in another EU member state are taxed either by the regular Dutch VAT rate for domestic sales, or with the VAT rate of the EU member state where the seller is based in the event that certain sales volumes are not met.

## INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

### Design protection

### 12 | Which IP rights are applicable to fashion designs? What rules and procedures apply to obtaining protection?

Fashion designs may be protected by a wide range of IP rights in the Netherlands, which can in part also overlap.

Dutch case law easily accepts copyright protection in works of applied art, including fashion designs. As there is no registration requirement, this offers a straightforward way for fashion designs to be protected. An added benefit is that Dutch case law will in certain cases accept a pan-European injunction on the basis of copyright in the event of a copyright infringement. It must, however, be ensured that the copyright is vested in the right party and that the design process is properly documented. While copyright will automatically accrue to the employer where a work is created within the framework of the employment, provided no other agreements are in place, the copyright commissioned works created by freelancers or outside agencies will remain with the author (thus such freelancer or agency) unless a written deed of copyright transfer is executed.

Fashion designs may also be protected through registered and unregistered design rights. Registered design rights are available at either the Benelux or EU level, while unregistered design rights are only granted at an EU level pursuant to the EU Design Regulation, the latter only giving a short period of protection of three years. Neither a Benelux design right application nor an EU design right application is

submitted to a substantive check on novelty and individual character before registration, so a registered right is relatively easy to obtain but at the same time not guaranteed to be valid. Having a registered right may be beneficial in enforcement activities.

Fashion designs may in some circumstances also be registered as a trademark. There is the option of going for a Benelux trademark or for an EU trademark. However, contrary to design rights, trademarks are substantively examined before registration and it is also possible for third parties to file an opposition within two months (for a Benelux trademark) or within three months (for an EU trademark) from publication. Fashion designs often run into issues concerning a lack of distinctiveness, technical features or the fact that they add substantial value to the goods, which can all preclude them from being registered as a trademark.

Nowadays, with the increasing prevalence of fashion tech, event patents will be relevant for fashion designs. Although it is possible to file a Dutch patent application, most parties would use the European patent system instead.

Finally, additional protection may be found in the doctrine of slavish imitation, a part of unfair competition. This prevents against copying the look of a product, where that product has its own position on the market (as compared to the design of other similar products), there is a risk of confusion, and the copycat could have designed its product differently without detracting from the soundness and usefulness of the product.

### 13 | What difficulties arise in obtaining IP protection for fashion goods?

One difficulty that can arise is that fashion goods often also contain technical features. Such features cannot be protected under either copyright, design rights, trademarks or unfair competition. Yet they are usually not sufficiently inventive to merit patent protection either.

In terms of copyright and unfair competition, common style elements are also excluded from protection. Although a specific interpretation of a general style can be protected under copyright, it is sometimes difficult to draw a strict line between a general style and a specific interpretation. In the case *Broeren v Duijzens* (2013), the Dutch Supreme Court held that where it concerns a common style that is not protected under copyright law, no further protection will be offered under the doctrine of slavish imitation (unfair competition) either.

Several difficulties may also arise when trying to protect the appearance of fashion goods through trademark law.

Firstly, a trademark must be distinctive. In terms of word marks, this requirement is fairly simple and merely requires the proprietor not to pick a descriptive term. In relation to shape marks and other 2D representations of (parts of) goods including position marks, EU case law has consistently held that the average consumer is not accustomed to recognising such signs as an indication of origin where they coincide with the appearance of (part of) the product. These trademarks will therefore only be distinctive *ab initio* where they depart significantly from the norm or the customs in the sector at the time of filing. A mere variation of what is already on the market is not sufficient. If this cannot be shown, then the trademark applicant will need to provide evidence of the trademark having acquired distinctiveness through use in either the entire Benelux (for a Benelux trademark) or the entire EU (for an EU trademark).

Secondly, EU and Benelux trademark law also excludes protection for signs that consist of a shape or other characteristic that gives substantial value to the goods. Briefly put, if the consumer buys the goods because of their appealing look, then trademark law cannot provide protection for that look. Furthermore, also technical features or features that result from the nature of the goods are excluded from trademark protection. These three exceptions cannot be overcome by showing acquired distinctive character.

## **Brand protection**

### 14 | How are luxury and fashion brands legally protected in your jurisdiction?

Word and device marks may be protected through filing either a Benelux trademark application or an EU trademark application. Furthermore, the trade name of a company is separately protected under Dutch law as a trade name right, provided that it has been used externally in the course of trade. Whether any trade name rights exist depends on the use of the trade name, not on the registration thereof with the Dutch Chamber of Commerce. The registration of a domain name as such does not create any rights but may under certain circumstances contribute to establishing use of a trade name. There is no recognition of unregistered trademarks under Dutch or Benelux law.

## **Licensing**

### 15 | What rules, restrictions and best practices apply to IP licensing in the fashion industry?

Rules governing IP licensing are distributed over the various acts relating to each type of IP right.

The Dutch Copyright Act provides that a licence can be granted for the whole or part of the copyright. An exclusive licence can only be granted by way of a written deed.

Both the Benelux Convention on Intellectual Property Rights (BCIP) and the EU Trademark Regulation provide that a licence to a trademark can be granted for all or part of the goods and for all or part of the territory. To invoke a licence against third parties, it should be recorded in the register. For fashion businesses, trademark licence agreements especially require special attention, given that sales contrary to the provisions of the licence agreement may still lead to exhaustion of trademark rights. In that case, the trademark owner will only have a claim against the licensee for breach of contract but will not be able to stop third parties from further marketing the goods in question. The owner can only rely on its trademark rights when the licensee has acted contrary to licence provisions regarding the (i) duration of the licence, (ii) form in which the trademark may be used, (iii) goods covered by the licence, (iv) territory and (v) quality of the goods and services. It is, therefore, essential to include clear arrangements on these points, especially concerning the quality and supervision requirements that the licensee must meet.

The BCIP and Community Design Regulation contain similar provisions as compared to those set out above for trademark licensing.

## **Enforcement**

### 16 | What options do rights holders have when enforcing their IP rights? Are there options for protecting IP rights through enforcement at the borders of your jurisdiction?

IP rights can be enforced in the Netherlands through preliminary injunction proceedings or proceedings on the merits. Where a case is particularly urgent and the infringement is clear cut, an injunction may also be obtained through *ex parte* proceedings without prior hearing of the defendant, particularly where delay would cause irreparable harm.

The Netherlands can be a particularly favourable jurisdiction for copyright holders, as Dutch courts readily grant copyright protection to works of applied art and furthermore under certain circumstances assume jurisdiction to grant pan-European injunction on the basis of copyright against Dutch defendants and any co-defendant sued in the same action with a Dutch defendant where there is a close connection between the cases.

Dutch customs are also active in stopping counterfeit and other infringing goods from entering the EU via the Netherlands through

their specialised IP team in Groningen. Customs may stop suspected infringing goods *ex officio* and will then contact the rights owner and the addressee of the goods, but it is also possible to submit a customs request asking customs to pro-actively monitor for any suspected infringements. In the latter case it may be recommendable to organise training sessions with customs to properly identify counterfeit.

Finally, rights holders can also take action against the registration of any conflicting trademark applications through filing oppositions, cancellations and revocations at the Benelux Office for Intellectual Property.

## **DATA PRIVACY AND SECURITY**

### **Legislation**

#### 17 | What data privacy and security laws are most relevant to fashion and luxury companies?

The EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 (GDPR), the Dutch GDPR Implementation Act and articles 11.7 and 11.7a of the Dutch Telecommunications Act implementing the spam and cookie obligations under the EU ePrivacy Directive (2002/58/EC, as amended 2009/136/EC).

### **Compliance challenges**

#### 18 | What challenges do data privacy and security laws present to luxury and fashion companies and their business models?

Generally, the luxury and fashion industries face challenges with regard to data security. Companies operating in these industries are most often public facing and well-known brands for whom negative publicity about security incidents could seriously damage the reputation of their brand. This is all the more relevant because most administrative fines imposed under the GDPR are related to security, data breaches and a lack of technical and organisational security measures to safeguard personal data.

Furthermore, as a consumer-focused industry, the retail fashion industry will face various challenges in the field of spam, cookies and other forms of direct marketing. For example, there are continued developments around new legislation for direct marketing, both on a Dutch as well as European level, as illustrated by proposed new rules on telemarketing in the Netherlands as well as renewed attempts for an ePrivacy Regulation. Further to this, in the absence of the aforementioned ePrivacy Regulation, more and more European regulators have issued guidelines and started enforcement proceedings on direct marketing topics, often using the GDPR as a way to justify a stricter interpretation of direct marketing rules. Companies such as retail fashion companies operating in these areas are advised to keep a close watch on these developments.

### **Innovative technologies**

#### 19 | What data privacy and security concerns must luxury and fashion retailers consider when deploying innovative technologies in association with the marketing of goods and services to consumers?

Some new technologies can be quite invasive and intrusive to the privacy of individuals. When use of such technologies involves the processing of personal data, it must adhere to the general principles of necessity and proportionality. In short, these requirements together ensure that the most effective and least intrusive way (ie, also in consideration of alternatives that are less intrusive) to process personal data is chosen and that the interference in the privacy of individuals is proportionate in consideration of the objectives of the retail fashion company.

Especially with more invasive innovative technologies such as facial recognition, it could be that the use of such technologies does not meet the requirements of necessity and proportionality when deployed. Companies wishing to apply such technologies are advised (and sometimes required) to perform a data protection impact assessment (DPIA), which will, *inter alia*, allow them to assess how to meet these requirements.

Furthermore, most EU countries have specific national rules for the processing of special category data such as biometric data. In the Netherlands, for example, the use of biometrics (including fingerprints and facial recognition) is restricted by law to specific purposes.

### **Content personalisation and targeted advertising**

20 | What legal and regulatory challenges must luxury and fashion companies address to support personalisation of online content and targeted advertising based on data-driven inferences regarding consumer behaviour?

With regard to both advertising techniques there are a lot of developments ongoing on the legal spectrum, both in the Netherlands as well as in Europe. The trend appears to shift towards a stricter interpretation and use of advertising techniques, but it is currently unclear where the boundaries will fall and for which technologies they will apply.

For example, there are continued developments around new legislation for direct marketing, both on a Dutch as well as a European level, as illustrated by proposed new rules on telemarketing in the Netherlands and renewed attempts for an ePrivacy Regulation. Further to this, in the absence of the aforementioned ePrivacy Regulation, more and more European regulators have issued guidelines and started enforcement proceedings on direct marketing topics, often using the GDPR as a way to justify a stricter interpretation of direct marketing rules. Companies such as retail fashion companies operating in these areas are advised to keep a close watch on these developments.

In the Netherlands, certain forms of profiling or personalisation could trigger the need for a DPIA.

## **ADVERTISING AND MARKETING**

### **Law and regulation**

21 | What laws, regulations and industry codes are applicable to advertising and marketing communications by luxury and fashion companies?

Advertising and marketing communications are firstly covered by the rules on unfair commercial practices (articles 193a to 193j, Dutch Civil Code) and misleading and comparative advertising (articles 194 to 196, Dutch Civil Code).

There is also a self-regulatory framework called the Dutch Advertising Code. This Code applies to all types of advertising and may be enforced through recommendations from the Dutch Advertising Code Committee and naming and shaming for parties who do not comply. Particularly relevant for luxury and fashion companies are the specialised codes on social media and influencer marketing and on cosmetics.

### **Online marketing and social media**

22 | What particular rules and regulations govern online marketing activities and how are such rules enforced?

Currently, the rules for online marketing – in particular influencers and vloggers – are mainly based on two types of self-regulation:

- Advertising on social media is covered by the Dutch Advertising Code Social Media & Influencer Marketing (RSM), which is enforced by submitting a complaint to the Dutch Advertising Code Committee,

who can issue a warning and who keep a naming-and-shaming list for parties who do not comply. The main requirements of the RSM are: (i) ads must be identified as such where there has been any compensation in cash or in kind; (ii) children under 12 years old may not be used to advertise products or services on social media; and (iii) the advertiser is responsible for ensuring that the influencer follows these rules.

- Several YouTube vloggers have created De Social Code, which provides guidance on when and how to identify that a video has been sponsored. There are no sanctions for non-compliance.

Advertising on TV is already covered by the Media Act, which is supervised by the Dutch Media Authority that can enforce the Act through substantial fines. After the implementation of the new Media Act, expected in September 2020, influencers' online video channels will also be covered by the Media Act and can be subject to the same substantial fines as already apply to advertising on TV.

## **PRODUCT REGULATION AND CONSUMER PROTECTION**

### **Product safety rules and standards**

23 | What product safety rules and standards apply to luxury and fashion goods?

In the Netherlands, the relevant product safety rules and standards are included in the Dutch Commodities Act, including underlying legislation, such as the General Product Safety (Commodities Act) Decree. This legislation mainly includes safety requirements and labeling and packaging requirements.

Specifically for luxury and fashion goods, the Textile Articles (Commodities Act) Decree will also be relevant. This is the Dutch implementation of EU Regulation No. 1007/2011. This Decree, *inter alia*, contains the obligation to label goods that consist of over 80 per cent textile. Rules regarding the fire safety of fashion and, in particular, nightwear are, *inter alia*, included in enforcement agreements on fire safety of clothing.

### **Product liability**

24 | What regime governs product liability for luxury and fashion goods? Has there been any notable recent product liability litigation or enforcement action in the sector?

The regime that governs product liability is included in Title 6.3.3 of the Dutch Civil Code. This is the Dutch implementation of the European Product Liability Directive (Directive 85/374/EEG). The rules on product liability protect consumers against damage or injury caused by defective products.

Product liability is, in principle, a strict liability under the Dutch tort regime and cannot be excluded in a contract. In principle, the producer is liable for damage caused by a defect in his or her product.

## **M&A AND COMPETITION ISSUES**

### **M&A and joint ventures**

25 | Are there any special considerations for M&A or joint venture transactions that companies should bear in mind when preparing, negotiating or entering into a deal in the luxury fashion industry?

As with M&A transactions in any sector, one should consider what would be the preferred deal structure (*i.e.*, whether the transaction should be structured as a share sale or a sale of all or part of the assets of the target company). Generally speaking, intellectual property is a key

component in M&A transactions in the luxury fashion industry, which is reflected in the due diligence investigations as well as in the transaction documentation (notably the representations and warranties). In addition, retention of key persons (such as designers) as well as restrictive covenants is often a point of attention.

Technological innovations are also becoming increasingly important in the luxury fashion industry. Many fashion companies have (in one way or another) an online sales and marketing presence, which triggers all sorts of potential legal issues that are often part of the scope of due diligence and transaction documentation.

## Competition

### 26 | What competition law provisions are particularly relevant for the luxury and fashion industry?

Competition law plays a role in the luxury and fashion industry in relation to all forms of distribution and online sales, particularly when it concerns exclusive arrangements, selective distribution, pricing arrangements, customer allocation, etc. Articles 6 and 24 of the Dutch Competition Act (DCA) are the cornerstones of the Dutch competition law framework. Article 6 DCA corresponds to article 101 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – prohibition of restrictive agreements and concerted practices. Article 24 DCA corresponds to article 102 TFEU – prohibition of abuse of dominance.

The EU competition law regime for 'vertical agreements' (EU Vertical Block Exemption Regulation No. 330/2010 and accompanying Guidelines on the application of article 101(3) TFEU to vertical agreements) applies directly to the distribution of luxury and fashion products in the Netherlands. The notion of vertical agreements covers all types of distribution or re-selling of products or services, except agency agreements under which the agent bears no commercial or financial risk for the products or services delivered (other than its own commission). This EU regime, dating from 2010, is currently under review. The EU Commission is expected to issue a draft for the new block exemption on vertical agreements in the course of 2020.

While recommending resale prices to distributors and retailers is generally allowed under the regime for vertical agreements, it is considered illegal to restrict a distributor's freedom to determine its resale price with the exception of maximum resale prices. Similarly, restrictions of online sales, restrictions on reselling and absolute territorial protection (passive sales bans) are generally prohibited.

Recently, e-commerce agreements are under more scrutiny as the European Commission is stepping up enforcement on e-commerce agreements (following its Digital Single Market objectives). As the Commission notes in its recent ecommerce sector inquiry, there is an uptake in selective distribution as this enables suppliers of (luxury) brand products to get more control over the quality of distribution of their products. The Dutch Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM) considers that dual pricing may be justified according to article 101(3) TFEU. Thus, the supplier may ask a different price for products that will be sold online (eg, if the costs for offline reselling are significantly higher compared to the online sale).

Companies that are not dominant are generally free to determine their own resale prices and discounts as well as their contract partners. Even if dominant, the application of different prices to different customers or different categories of customers for goods whose costs are the same does not in itself indicate exclusionary abuse (ACM decision of 30 August 2012 in case 7464 *Van der Zwan - Kluwer*). There are no specific Dutch rules prohibiting selling at a loss (for non-dominant companies).

## EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR

### Managing employment relationships

#### 27 | What employment law provisions should fashion companies be particularly aware of when managing relationships with employees? What are the usual contractual arrangements for these relationships?

Because the fashion industry particularly works with a lot of freelancers and external creative experts, there is always a risk that the arrangement with a contingency worker will be reclassified as an employment agreement, if challenged by the contingency worker. The contingency worker may be inclined to do so, for example, in case of sickness (claiming statutory continued payment of sickness) or upon the termination of the relationship at the initiative of the employer. The test to be applied by the court will include many elements, the most important one being the question whether or not the employer exercises supervision and control over the contingency worker. The court will apply a 'substance over form' test.

Without going into detail, in essence there are only two relevant types of contracts for contingency workers:

- a services agreement for the provision of well-defined services, whereby the recipient of those services (the fashion company) will not exercise supervision and control over the service provider (or individual worker who will be engaged in the provision of the services) or the individual contractor; and
- a supply of personnel agreement, pursuant to which the supplier will supply the individual worker to the fashion company to perform work for the benefit and under supervision and control of the fashion company.

The likeliness of the above-mentioned risks materialising will largely depend on the chosen contracting structure, but also on the actual performance (compliance with the structure parameters).

Another common contractual arrangement in the fashion industry relates to interns: provided that the individual is truly engaged as an intern (i.e., no employment; no real work contribution; no real work obligation; preferably still registered at university; no salary, just a moderate allowance), the risk of requalification in this respect will be limited. However, if the internship agreement is reclassified as an employment agreement (at the initiative of the intern), the time spent will count towards continuous service. Under Dutch law, this would count as an initial fixed-term employment agreement, meaning the following contract will count as the second employment agreement (which, under certain circumstances, may lead to the employment agreement being considered permanent).

### Trade unions

#### 28 | Are there any special legal or regulatory considerations for fashion companies when dealing with trade unions or works councils?

### Trade union

Collective labour agreements are rather common in the Netherlands, either at the company or industry level. In principle, the collective labour agreement binds the parties and their members. In some sectors, however, (parts of) a collective labour agreement can be binding by law for all employers and employees working in a specific sector. The Collective Labour Agreement Retail Non-Food – Fashion Sport & Lifestyle has a long history of being binding by law and this is also currently the case (until 31 December 2020).

Trade unions mainly play a role in negotiating collective labour agreements and in situations involving mass redundancies.

## Works council

Especially relevant for larger fashion companies that, for instance, have their headquarters in the Netherlands is the fact that each company with 50 employees or more should install a works council. In addition to the right to information, the main rights of the works council are the right to provide advice and the right of prior consent.

Works councils have a legal right to provide advice on a number of legally prescribed important topics. This advice should be sought at a time when the works council can still materially influence the decision of the company. If the company does not respect the advice of the works council, the works council can petition a special chamber of the Court of Appeal of Amsterdam.

Works councils also have a legal right to provide consent prior to a decision to introduce, amend or abolish a regulation on a number of legally prescribed topics. If a works council does not consent to a proposed decision and the company wants to continue with the decision, the company should seek consent from a cantonal judge. If a company does not obtain prior consent or approval of a cantonal judge and still continues with the decision, the works council can annul the decision.

The costs reasonably necessary for the performance of the duties of the works council shall be borne by the employer.

## Immigration

**29 | Are there any special immigration law considerations for fashion companies seeking to move staff across borders or hire and retain talent?**

Because a large number of international fashion companies have their headquarters in the Netherlands and these companies are often run by an international workforce, immigration law can be an important topic in the industry. Employees from the European Union (except Croatia), European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland do not have to obtain a valid work permit before starting work.

A work permit will in principle (i.e., unless an exception applies) only be granted to the employer of nationals from outside the EU, EEA or Switzerland if no potential worker can be found within the EU, EEA or Switzerland. The work permit must be obtained prior to the foreign worker performing any work.

Several exceptions apply to the requirement to obtain a work permit. Some examples are where:

- the foreign worker performs certain types of work and occasionally works in the Netherlands for a short period (examples include business trips, preparation of fashion shows or the launch of a new store);
- the foreign worker is a 'highly skilled migrant';
- the foreign worker holds a residence permit that states 'permitted to work';
- the foreign national holds a residence permit allowing self-employment for the type of work concerned; and
- the foreign national has attained at least a Master's degree in the Netherlands, then he or she can obtain a residence permit for a maximum of one year to find a job as a highly skilled migrant or to start an innovative company.



### Manon Rieger-Jansen

manon.rieger.jansen@twobirds.com

### Roelien van Neck

roelien.van.neck@twobirds.com

### Pauline Kuipers

pauline.kuipers@twobirds.com

### Nina Dorenbosch

nina.dorenbosch@twobirds.com

### Lisette den Butter

lisette.denbutter@twobirds.com

### Chelsea Gunning

chelsea.gunning@twobirds.com

### Chloë Baartmans

chloe.baartmans@twobirds.com

### Goran Danilovic

goran.danilovic@twobirds.com

### Marinke Moeliker

marinke.moeliker@twobirds.com

Zuid-Hollandplein 22

2596 AW The Hague

The Netherlands

Tel: +3170 353 8800

Fax: +31 70 353 8811

www.twobirds.com

## UPDATE AND TRENDS

### Trends and developments

**30 | What are the current trends and future prospects for the luxury fashion industry in your jurisdiction? Have there been any notable recent market, legal and or regulatory developments in the sector? What changes in law, regulation, or enforcement should luxury and fashion companies be preparing for?**

Like other luxury and fashion companies around the world, the Dutch market is currently focused primarily on increasing sustainability in the sector, finding new ways of introducing a circular economy and creating value from 're-commerce'. Subscription and rental models for fashion products are gaining importance and this increased focus on sustainability and shifting consumer behaviour is putting pressure on the more traditional fast-fashion companies. Another future prospect is fashion tech, which is already starting to blur the line between fashion companies and tech development.

There are a few changes in the law on the horizon, which may be relevant to luxury and fashion companies. For instance, the EU Commission is expected to issue a draft for the new block exemption on vertical agreements in the course of 2020, which will impact the distribution of luxury and fashion products. In the field of direct marketing, there are continued developments around new legislation, both on a

Dutch as well as a European level. Finally, the new Media Act is set to be implemented in September 2020, which will have consequences for advertising through online vlogging as it places influencers' online video channels within the scope of the Media Act and thereby potentially makes them subject to substantial fines in case of non-compliance.

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