Marketing Doctor

Marketing Check-up

Abercrombie & Fitch

As of May 26, 2026

Condition: Under observation

After the cool kids

For years Abercrombie & Fitch sold exclusion on purpose: shirtless models, perfume-drenched stores and no XL or XXL sizes. Under Fran Horowitz, chief executive since 2017, it rebuilt the brand around belonging and grew for 13 straight quarters. As of May 26, 2026, the group is at a record, but the namesake brand is slowing. This check-up looks at the Jeffries era, the rebuild and the split between its two brands.

Key takeaways

- Under Mike Jeffries, exclusion was the positioning. He said in 2006 that the brand was “absolutely” exclusionary, and by 2014 teens were shopping elsewhere.
- Fran Horowitz kept the name and changed the promise, from fitting in to belonging. The company ended its sexualized marketing, lightened its stores, dropped the moose logo and expanded sizes.
- The rebuild worked. Fiscal 2025 was a record year, capped by a 13th straight quarter of growth.
- Growth now leans on Hollister, up 15% in fiscal 2025, while comparable sales at the Abercrombie brands fell 7%.

Marketing health check

Area	Finding
Positioning	Repaired. From exclusion to belonging.
Distance from the past	Clear, an analyst says, despite the legacy court case.
Hollister	Strong. Sales up 15% in fiscal 2025.
Abercrombie brands	Slowing. Comparable sales down 7%.
Group growth	13 straight quarters, ending in a record year.

Timeline

When	What happened
1992	Mike Jeffries becomes chief executive.
2006	Jeffries tells Salon the brand is “absolutely” exclusionary.
Oct 2014	Fran Horowitz joins to run Hollister.
Dec 9, 2014	Jeffries retires, effective immediately.
2015	The U.S. Supreme Court rules against the company in a headscarf hiring case.
Feb 1, 2017	Horowitz becomes chief executive.
Oct 22, 2024	Federal prosecutors charge Jeffries, who pleads not guilty.
Fiscal 2025	A record year; Hollister up 15%, Abercrombie comparable sales down 7%.

What happened: a brand built on exclusion

Mike Jeffries ran the company from 1992 to 2014. The brand sold shirtless male models and perfume-drenched stores, and for years it refused to make XL or XXL sizes. In a 2006 interview with Salon, Jeffries said every school had its cool, popular kids and its not-so-cool kids, and asked: “Are we exclusionary? Absolutely.” That was deliberate brand positioning, and it turned shoppers away by design.

By 2014, teens were shopping elsewhere and the company was removing its once-prized logo from products. Jeffries retired, effective immediately, in December 2014. The next year the U.S.

Supreme Court ruled against the company in a case over Samantha Elauf, a Muslim woman who wore a headscarf and was not hired under its Look Policy, which barred caps as too informal for its image.

The treatment: keep the name, change the promise

Fran Horowitz joined in October 2014 to run Hollister and was promoted to chief executive in February 2017. She aimed the brand at young millennials, the shoppers it had pushed away as teens, and described the change as a move from “fitting in” to “belonging.” The company stopped its sexualized marketing, lightened its stores, dropped the moose logo and expanded its sizes.

The name stayed. The promise and the customer changed, which in our view is often a better answer than a full rebrand.

The result: a record year, carried by Hollister

In the year to January 31, 2026, Abercrombie & Fitch Co. reported record sales, up 6%, and Horowitz said the fourth quarter was its 13th consecutive quarter of growth.

Underneath, the brands split. Hollister’s sales rose 15%, with comparable sales up 13%. The Abercrombie brands’ sales fell 1%, and their comparable sales fell 7%. Brand-level marketing KPIs show a split that group totals hide. For fiscal 2026 the company expects slower growth.

The legacy case: distance from the past

On October 22, 2024, federal prosecutors charged Jeffries and two other men with sex trafficking and interstate prostitution. The Justice Department noted that the charges are allegations and that the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty. All three men have pleaded not guilty. Whether Jeffries is competent to stand trial was still before the court as of May 26, 2026, and jury selection is set for October 26, 2026 if he is found fit.

For the brand, the test is distance. GlobalData analyst Neil Saunders told CNN in October 2024 that there is sufficient distance between today’s Abercrombie and the brand of the past. Years of different behaviour made that distance possible.

Lessons for your marketing

1. Exclusion can build heat with one group, but it shrinks the market and ages with its customers.
2. When your positioning pushes people away, change the promise before you change the name.
3. Win back the customers you once turned away. They may now be your best market.
4. Read each brand's vitals on its own. A record year for the group can hide a slowing flagship.
5. Distance from a past leader is built by years of different behaviour, not by a statement.

The doctor will see you now.

Book a free marketing check-up at marketingdoctor.ca/contact. We'll examine your marketing, show you what's holding growth back and prescribe what to fix first.

Sources

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