



Levi Strauss and Google: Connected, not distracted!

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Imagine a piece of clothing with tech built into the fabric providing an ever-expanding toolkit of abilities accessible by simple gestures. The Levi's® Trucker Jacket with Jacquard™ by Google can do just that, which is what makes it so revolutionary.

Patrick Van Eecke (Partner, Brussels) interviewing Sandrine Besnard-Corblet, Chief European Counsel for Levi Strauss & Co. Europe

At the outset, could you tell me something about yourself and your role at Levi Strauss? How did you get here and what excites you the most about being in your position?

I am the Chief European Counsel for Levi Strauss & Co. Europe (LS&Co). I have been working for LS&Co for almost 25 years and prior to that, I worked at the law firm Gide Loyrette Nouel in Paris where I took care of all the trademark enforcement work for LS&Co. So, my association with the company and the Levi's brand goes back a long while. There are many reasons why I have stayed so long at LS&Co.: the products and the brands are iconic, the culture of the company is very strong and is embedded in "Profits through principles" and finally, the people working at LS&Co. are amazing and bring very rich and diverse perspectives to the table.

On the face of it, Levi Strauss and Google are very different companies, with a different history and offering very different services. Was it difficult for both companies to work together on a project?

The Levi's® brand is built on innovation, creativity and a pioneering spirit that has helped individuals around the world express their personal style for more than 140 years. Google brings advanced knowledge of the technologies, platforms and digital systems needed to make enabled apparel a viable possibility, in particular through its Jacquard technology. When you think about denim – it's really one of the toughest fabrics, and so we thought, if we're really going to put Jacquard to the test and see what's possible, why not start there, with the Levi's® Trucker Jacket?

The two companies are indeed very different and they bring different cultures, strengths and ways of working to the project. The meeting of engineers and designers! This is the second season of the Levi's® Trucker Jacket with Jacquard™ by Google and we have learned to work together in a very efficient way. We have taken the idea one step further, transitioning Jacquard from a single product with abilities tailored to the needs of a focused consumer group to an ever-evolving product platform with a broad and inclusive range of connected capabilities.

What exactly is Google Jacquard™, what does it do, and how does it fit in with Levi's® products?

The premise and purpose of the product remains the same: you can keep your phone in your pocket and your eyes on the world around you, staying connected without being distracted.

As with the original version of the Jacquard™-equipped Levi's® Trucker, this new version features an ever-expanding range of abilities, accessible via gestures on the cuff that are conducted through the Jacquard™ Tag, which is smaller than a stick of gum. Wearers can access navigation, rideshare apps, weather and traffic reports, messaging, music, phone and more. And new features will be added regularly – both to versions 1.0 and 2.0 of the jacket, meaning the Levi's® Trucker with Jacquard™ will only get better with age.

What were the legal challenges you faced in this project? Was DLA Piper able to assist Levi Strauss with these challenges?

The Jacquard™-equipped Levi's® Trucker is launching globally in the US, the UK, Italy, Germany, France, Japan, New Zealand and Australia, with Belgium, Netherlands and Taiwan coming up next spring. With so many countries, it was important to understand the regulatory requirements on the manufacturing and sale of electronic products; for example, labelling recycling, product safety, storage, transportation: we are not organized as a company to handle tech products, so we had to learn on the fly! Another critical point was consumer warranties, which differ by country, how to best provide consumers with after-sales support and how to handle returns and refunds. Data privacy was also obviously a key consideration. Finally, we had to think carefully through our distribution strategy for this product and we are only offering it to key accounts that are able to provide consumers with the appropriate level of services.

We worked with DLA Piper's London office, which supported us on the contract negotiations with Google and helped us navigate and understand the various regulatory and consumer law aspects associated with such an innovative product type, coordinating the work across all jurisdictions.

What are the key takeaways from this project? What advice would you give to other legal counsels of retail companies attempting to re-invent their products and services?

Like our business colleagues, we, as legal counsel, need to have consumers in mind first and foremost when we provide legal advice and assess legal risks. Consumers demand innovation and value but also transparency and trust. The way we shape our advice, the understanding of the risk appetite of our company, our ability to deal with multiple jurisdictions and recommend trade-offs, to simplify and streamline have strong implications on the ability of the brand to meaningfully interact with its consumers.

I sense a general acceleration of how products and services get re-invented based on the premise of Think big-Start small-Scale fast. Legal advisors need to show agility and adaptability and a willingness to have skin the game. This is what makes the job fun as well!

Is connected clothing just marketing hype to attract more customers, or is this the future of how we will dress?

When our everyday things are enhanced, our lives are enhanced – enabling us to do more of what we love through the things we love. It is true for many things and it is true for apparel. Our consumers are highly connected and Jacquard™ enables them to connect to their digital life instantly and effortlessly while being focused on what matters most, especially when they are on the move, commuting, riding a bike, hurrying to an important meeting, or hanging out with friends.

Finally – will we also see connected jeans in the future?

The Levi's® brand has been around for 140 years and has built a track record of innovation, style and quality rooted in consumer insights. So, why not? Remember, LS&Co. invented jeans so we can invent connected jeans!

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