Payless shoe store pulls prank to change its luck with sales
By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff
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To many, Bruno Palessi appeared to be an Italian shoe designer.

In October, people lined up at a store in Los Angeles. They were told Palessi would be having a special release event. They happily paid high prices for his shoes.

There was one problem. There is no Bruno Palessi.

He was made up by Payless ShoeSource. It is a store in many malls. Payless sells discounted shoes.

Prank Event

Payless made this event as a prank. The company hoped to change the belief that it just sells cheap, unfashionable shoes.

However the prank also teaches about human behavior. Customers cannot truly understand the quality and value of the things they buy, said Philip Graves. He studies buyer behavior in Britain.

You can have a pair of $30 shoes. If you just put a label on them that says a fancy European designer made them, people will think they are better.

The prank was dreamed up by a New York advertising company. They help other companies sell their products.

Trying To Change Its Luck

Payless has been doing poorly. Last year, it had to close hundreds of stores. The company wanted to change its luck.

First, the company rented out a storefront. It was in a mall with many expensive stores. The mall is in Los Angeles, California.
Next, they needed a name. The team wanted something that sounded like Payless. They came up with Palessi.

The team made the store look fancy. They brought in a big angel statue. There were also gold statues of lions and a giraffe. Some people were paid to act as workers.

The team neatly arranged different shoes on glass shelves. They covered the original labels with stickers that said "PALESSI."

Then, finally, they needed possible customers. They searched the streets and online for fashionable people.

**Paying Hundreds For Shoes**

The event took place on October 27. People lined up for the party. In the back of the store, the Payless team watched customers on screens. As people arrived, they were asked on camera what they thought of the shoes. Many people said they would pay hundreds for them.

"Palessi is just such high quality, high fashion," said one man. He held a high-heeled, knee-high boot.

"For me to experience this as an Italian designer is amazing," said another man.

Attendees bought expensive shoes. Some cost $200, $400 and $600. Then, they were taken toward the back room. There the prank was revealed.

"You've got to be kidding me," said a woman. She had gushed about a pair of high heels.

The team said those who bought the shoes were allowed to keep them for free.

Graves said this advertising prank will not help Payless much.

When people go to Payless, they will not see a fancy, red-carpeted store, he said. They will just see normal Payless shoes and pricing.

Sarah Couch is an official for Payless. She hopes Graves is wrong. Couch hopes more people try Payless' website. It is different from the mall stores, she added.

Directions: Use the information found in the article to identify the **best** response for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says explicitly</th>
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| 1. Who is Bruno Palessi?  
A. He is a designer of high quality shoes.  
B. He is the owner of Payless Shoe Store.  
C. He is a shoe designer made up by Payless ShoeSource.  
D. He is the owner of a mall in Los Angeles, California. |
| 2. Why did Payless make up the shoe prank?  
A. Their goal was to do an experiment on human behavior and buying habits.  
B. They were looking for a new name for their shoe stores.  
C. They hoped to improve sales by changing the belief that they sell cheap, unfashionable shoes.  
D. They had opened a new store in a mall in Los Angeles, and they wanted to have strong sales at their grand opening event. |
| 3. In this prank, Payless charged people hundreds of dollars for $30 shoes. How did they make it right with the customers for spending so much money on Payless shoes?  
A. Payless gave away gift cards to be used for more shoes when shopping online at Payless.com.  
B. Payless directed customers to their website to complete a form requesting a full refund.  
C. Payless told the customers about the prank, refunded their money, and let them keep the shoes.  
D. Payless told the customers about the prank, and then allowed them to choose two more pairs of shoes for free. |
| 4. Philip Graves, who studies buyer behavior in Britain, says this prank will not help Payless. Why not?  
A. The employees at Payless don’t provide good customer service.  
B. The shoes at Payless cost much less than the Palessi brand.  
C. Payless is not a fancy store. They are just a store that sells cheap shoes.  
D. Payless has already filed for bankruptcy, so it’s too late to make any changes. |