

Walmart to Sell Handicrafts Made By Women Artisans in Developing Countries

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Walmart has always competed with Main Street clothing and houseware stores, but starting next spring, the retail giant may be going head-to-head with specialty stores like Ten Thousand Villages that sell handmade arts and crafts.

Walmart will begin selling one-of-a-kind handicrafts made by women artisans in developing countries online at Walmart.com.

It's a surprise move for a retailer whose empire is built on offering mass-produced items at discount prices. But for a West Hartford nonprofit, Aid To Artisans Inc., whose mission is helping third-world artisans develop and sell their handicrafts to buyers in North America, Walmart's new venture could represent a major new market.

Aid To Artisans (ATA) has asked Walmart to include in its selection a group of handicrafts made by women artisans in Colombia. ATA has been helping the Wayuu artisans of Colombia develop a line of cup and bottle sleeves made from colorful yarn, recycled plastic bottles and inner tubes.

... Skeptics and Supporters

Walmart's reputation among liberals and labor groups suffered in a decade-old lawsuit charging gender discrimination, the largest of its kind ever filed, which the U.S. Supreme Court threw out earlier this year.

Improving its corporate image may play a part, but that doesn't diminish the Walmart Foundation's effort to improve the economic station of women, said Aaron Dorfman, executive director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. "A lot of this is a thoughtful reaction to the criticism of the corporation over the years. There are legitimate criticisms of Walmart and some of its practices. But this to me seems like a positive initiative."

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