

Website hopes McFly boots will come back in the future

Mysterious group seeks to pressure Nike

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A slick but mysterious website is leading an Internet campaign to turn Michael J. Fox's snowboard-like boots from Back to the Future 2 into a latest fashion trend.

The McFly 2015 Project bills itself as "a grassroots movement to get Nike (Inc.) to make available to consumers the futuristic-looking sneakers seen in the 1989 movie."

Nike officials this week would not comment on the sneakers or whether the shoe giant is behind the campaign. The McFly Project, said to comprise 10 Montreal designers and writers, did not respond to requests for an interview.

However in an e-mail statement, Michael Maloof, who said he founded the group with his brother, Charles, called the shoes "the Holy Grail" for all sneaker nerds.

"These sneakers were made exclusively for the 1989 film Back to the Future 2; Michael J. Fox wore them in the movie, they were never released to the public. Every kid who watched the movie back in 1989 wanted these shoes, including us."

The group has mailed buttons, pins and stickers to supporters that point to its website, www.mcfly2015.com. It has also created commercials that have been scattered across YouTube and other video websites.

More than 10,000 people signed a petition on the site in the first week after it was launched in April, according to Mr. Maloof.

American rock band WhirlwindHeat is urging fans to sign the McFly 2015 petition. The band hopes to get pairs of the shoes to wear on an upcoming tour.

In the movie, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) replaces his tennis shoes with the boot-like sneakers so he will fit in with 2015 society. They become a focal point as McFly runs from gangs, skateboards around a park and uses a "hover-board."

Fashion industry experts believe they could succeed as a niche product today.

"I am sure that they will appeal to a certain audience," said Kimberly Law, founder of Personal Image Advisor, an image consulting company in Burnaby, B.C. She felt they could fit in with the "casual" dress of 15- to 30-year-olds, and a desire for fun and different clothing.

Jim Okamura, senior partner with retail consultant J.C. Williams Group, said shoe companies have been particularly aggressive in using the Internet to generate new designs and interest in their products.

He said Nike, The Timberland Co. and Converse Inc. have online ordering that allows customers to customize sneakers by colour, ankle-cut and other elements to suit their own tastes.

"It's really putting the tools in the consumer's hands," said Mr. Okamura. "Consumers are feeling more in control of the product they buy because they feel they have helped in creating them."

The process also tells shoe companies what colours and styles people are picking, giving them an inside track on trends.

He said the McFly campaign takes online ordering one step further by allowing consumers to use the Internet to solicit support of like-minded people and attract the

attention of a large corporation.

"It really gives consumers a voice," he said.

This isn't the first time a grassroots Internet campaign has aimed to change corporate thinking. Last month, CBS Corp. announced it would resume filming the TV show Jericho, which is based on what would happen to the world after a nuclear fallout.

The broadcaster had originally cancelled the show because of poor ratings.

But along with spurring thousands of letters, e-mails and faxes from fans, the campaign arranged to deliver 50,000 pounds of peanuts to CBS's New York headquarters to suggest the network was "nuts" for cancelling the show.

But other Internet phenomena have turned out to be orchestrated campaigns. The most infamous could "Lonelygirl15," a Myspace.com video blogger who was revealed as an actress promoting a story for a would-be movie deal.

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