

Alibaba's Jack Ma Cancels Appearance at Anti-Counterfeiting Conference Amid Fakes Dispute

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Amid an escalating controversy over whether [Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.](#) is doing enough to fight fakes on its shopping sites, Alibaba has canceled co-founder Jack Ma's appearance this week at the annual conference of a prominent anti-counterfeiting group.

In a blog post, an Alibaba spokeswoman said Michael Evans, Alibaba's president, will address the International AntiCounterfeiting Coalition in Orlando, Fla., on May 19 instead of Mr. Ma. The coalition had admitted Alibaba as a member in April, but said last week that it was suspending the newly-created category under which Alibaba was admitted "in consideration of some of the concerns raised by our membership."

"Given the IACC's desire for additional time to reflect upon the viability of its general membership category, Alibaba feels it best that Jack Ma postpone his appearance," the blog post said.

As of last week, Mr. Ma was still scheduled to speak. [Michael Kors Holdings Ltd.](#), which withdrew from the group last month in protest of Alibaba's membership, said that allowing Alibaba into the group provided "cover to our most dangerous and damaging adversary." Gucci America Inc. has also left the group and French luxury brand Longchamp said it wouldn't attend the annual meeting. The coalition, one of the world's largest groups working to combat fake and pirated products, wasn't immediately available for comment.

Alibaba's decision to cancel Mr. Ma's speech comes amid intense pressure from global brands. Companies had complained that IACC giving Alibaba top billing at the event was inappropriate given some brands' skepticism about the e-commerce giant's commitment to fighting fakes on its shopping platforms.

Having Alibaba's Mr. Evans speak "just adds insult to injury," said Kristina Montanaro Schrader, a Nashville-based lawyer representing more than a dozen brands. "Alibaba is still the keynote speaker, but now the brands are also being stood up by Jack Ma."

[Michael Kors](#) had criticized the IACC's email last month to members "enthusiastically" announcing Mr. Ma as the keynote speaker. "By admitting Alibaba as a member and applauding Mr. Ma's appearance at the Spring Conference, you give Mr. Ma a powerful tool to speak to brand owners and regulators about his efforts to work collaboratively

and effectively with brand owners -- in the experience of many of your members a shockingly brazen lie."

Some IACC members said they may still boycott any Alibaba speech.

"I am not interested in hearing Mr. Ma speak, nor anyone from Alibaba, speak" about the measures it is taking to fight counterfeits, said Rob Holmes, chief executive of IPCybercrime, which helps brands monitor counterfeit goods online.

Alibaba, in its blog post [Tuesday](#), said that it has a "zero tolerance" policy toward counterfeit goods and believes that the most effective way to deal with the issue is by working together with brands. IACC's suspension of the category under which Alibaba was admitted as a member is a step "in the wrong direction and regrettable," the e-commerce company said.

Instead of prepping for the keynote speech, Mr. Ma visited the White House and met with U.S. President [Barack Obama](#) in an unpublicized, off-the-record meeting. Alibaba confirmed the meeting, but declined to comment further. Mr. Ma and President [Obama](#) last met in November, when President [Obama](#) interviewed Mr. Ma on stage at the APEC CEO Summit.

An unsigned letter that said it was from global brands last week asked the IACC's board to convene a town-hall meeting to discuss brands' concerns or risk an "empty room" if Mr. Ma decided to speak at the conference. The Wall Street Journal couldn't verify who sent the letter.

--Alyssa Abkowitz and [Kathy chu](#). Follow Alyssa on [Twitter](#) [@alyssaabkowitz](#) and [Kathy](#) [@chukathy](#).