



BUSINESS



BCBG boss in Playboy condom caper

By [James Covert](#)

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Talk about a tussle over protection money.

A bizarre legal battle is escalating over a line of Playboy brand condoms — and fashion designer Max Azria is wrapped up in it.

The pint-size founder of the BCBG clothing empire is being sued for \$220 million by his partner in the licensed latex venture, who is accusing Azria of fraud, breach of contract and a host of other offenses that include “narcissism and delusions of grandeur.”

Azria — notorious in fashion circles for his thirst to cut new business deals even as his company struggles under mounds of debt — “begged” for a stake in the condom venture as soon as he learned of it in a conversation over dinner in 2009, according to a lawsuit filed by the partner, Jimmy Esebag, yesterday.

In exchange for a 20-percent stake, Azria promised to provide financing and distribution at retailers, including Walmart, the suit charged.

“I have a relationship with everybody. I am Max Azria,” the eccentric fashion mogul said in a recent deposition, according to court papers. “People are happy to have lunch with me. Anybody in America. Even the president of America.”

But Azria failed to deliver on the Walmart promise, the suit charges. As a result, “Playboy condoms have a very limited degree of worldwide retail penetration.”

Yesterday, a BCBG spokeswoman said Azria had prevailed in arbitration on the dispute a year earlier, and that his company is “confident he will also be victorious in the present lawsuit.”

The spokeswoman, likewise, alleged that Esebag has “also been sued for fraud by other business partners in relation to Playboy condom deals.”

Esebag’s lawyer, Bryan Freedman, replied that his client is “a well-respected businessman who has never been sued for fraud by anyone who was his partner in Playboy Condoms.”



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