# Gymshark’s Onyx launch disrupted by bot attacks but brand fights back with order cancellations



Gymshark’s Onyx collection, a highly anticipated range that had eluded fans for five years, recently faced a dramatic launch marred by an overwhelming bot interference. Launched amid a wave of excitement among weightlifters and fitness enthusiasts, the Onyx range has attained cult status, with earlier editions fetching prices upwards of £1,000 in online resale markets. The previous successful iteration was released back in 2020, leading to a surge of anticipation and numerous social media discussions about the return of this sought-after line.

In preparation for the launch, Gymshark's chief brand officer, Noel Mack, and CEO, Ben Francis, invested two years meticulously crafting the new T-shirts that are as much a testament to fitness culture as they are to marketing acuity. Mack emphasised the blend of aesthetics and functionality in the designs: “Does it make your shoulders look huge? Does it make your waist look tiny?” These considerations were paramount as they collaborated with athletes and influencers to ensure every detail resonated with the brand's dedicated followers.

Three weeks prior to the launch, Gymshark’s marketing strategies took an unconventional turn. Instead of relying on traditional advertising, the brand opted for a subtle ‘leak’ strategy, using social media to create buzz among its followers. This campaign cleverly infiltrated platforms like Reddit, where dedicated fans began sharing images and information about the impending release, setting the stage for an electrifying pop-up experience in major cities including New York, London, and Dubai.

At the New York event alone, over 1,500 fans gathered, eager to be part of the spectacle surrounding the elusive Onyx collection. This gathering was not merely a shopping opportunity; it transformed into an immersive experience featuring themed elements like a Batbike and participation from well-known brand ambassadors. Yet, despite the palpable excitement, the true test awaited on launch day.

As Gymshark's website went live, it quickly became evident that the surge of consumer interest had been eclipsed by malicious bot activity. As the session traffic surged, the website suffered a meltdown, with automated scripts snatching up inventory within minutes. Mack later recounted the shocking realisation: “We could see that some addresses had ordered 40 products in different sizes.” The bots, equipped with rapid navigation capabilities, had outpaced genuine fans, prompting immediate backlash as hooded tops appeared on resale sites for tenfold their original prices.

Faced with a potential public relations disaster and mounting consumer outrage, Mack made a controversial decision to cancel all bot-related orders, stating, “Morally, I can’t have this.” This response not only aimed to preserve brand integrity but also connected emotionally with their community. Gymshark quickly turned to social media to communicate with fans, sharing a light-hearted meme that resonated within its audience, garnering unexpected engagement.

However, the victory was bittersweet; while fans appreciated the brand’s response, many were still disheartened that they had been unable to secure their desired items. Some even called for a boycott, reflecting a broader frustration with online retail practices and the influence of technology on consumer experiences. This backdrop of dissatisfaction compelled Gymshark to adapt its approach for any future releases, learning from bot behaviour through research in online communities where such practices are shared.

Mack's strategy pivoted around understanding and mitigating the vulnerabilities that had allowed bots to exploit Gymshark’s systems. After a brief hiatus, the brand managed a successful re-launch, significantly reducing bot interference. Metrics showed improvement across the board—from website session time to overall sales—though consumer sentiment remained a lingering concern.

In the aftermath, Gymshark has continued to engage its community, teasing future collections and learning from past experiences. Mack's closing advice for fellow marketers encapsulated the heart of Gymshark’s response strategy: “When you’re confused, ask, ‘what would your customer want?’ And then the right decisions become really, really obvious.” This principle not only underscores Gymshark's commitment to its fans but also highlights the evolving nature of e-commerce and brand accountability in a digital age increasingly fraught with challenges.

Gymshark's resilience in navigating this dilemma showcases the brand’s dedication to its community while offering vital lessons for other companies facing similar challenges in a world where technology and consumer behaviour are in constant flux.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/how-gymshark-avoided-pr-crisis-after-bots-killed-its-onyx-drop), [[2]](https://gymfluencers.com/gymshark-onyx-v5-put-on-pause-as-bots-cause-chaos/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/how-gymshark-avoided-pr-crisis-after-bots-killed-its-onyx-drop), [[6]](https://www.gymshark.com/collections/onyx)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/how-gymshark-avoided-pr-crisis-after-bots-killed-its-onyx-drop), [[4]](https://www.thestreet.com/retail/gymshark-stumbles-big-time-and-customers-are-angry)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/how-gymshark-avoided-pr-crisis-after-bots-killed-its-onyx-drop), [[3]](https://www.thestreet.com/retail/gymshark-consumers-furious-call-for-boycott)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/how-gymshark-avoided-pr-crisis-after-bots-killed-its-onyx-drop), [[3]](https://www.thestreet.com/retail/gymshark-consumers-furious-call-for-boycott)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/how-gymshark-avoided-pr-crisis-after-bots-killed-its-onyx-drop), [[2]](https://gymfluencers.com/gymshark-onyx-v5-put-on-pause-as-bots-cause-chaos/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/how-gymshark-avoided-pr-crisis-after-bots-killed-its-onyx-drop), [[7]](https://row.gymshark.com/blog/article/nyc-exclusive-event)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/how-gymshark-avoided-pr-crisis-after-bots-killed-its-onyx-drop> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://gymfluencers.com/gymshark-onyx-v5-put-on-pause-as-bots-cause-chaos/> - Gymfluencers reports that Gymshark's Onyx V5 launch faced significant issues due to bots overwhelming the website, leading to the pause of the release. The brand's CEO, Ben Francis, announced the cancellation of all fraudulent and bot orders, emphasizing that Onyx is intended for real fans, not bots. The article highlights the challenges Gymshark faced in combating bot interference during the launch.
3. <https://www.thestreet.com/retail/gymshark-consumers-furious-call-for-boycott> - TheStreet discusses the backlash Gymshark faced after the Onyx collection launch was marred by bot interference, causing the website to crash and leaving many customers unable to purchase the products. Consumers expressed their frustration on social media, with some calling for a boycott of the brand. The article examines the impact of the bot issue on Gymshark's reputation and customer trust.
4. <https://www.thestreet.com/retail/gymshark-stumbles-big-time-and-customers-are-angry> - This article from TheStreet delves into the problems Gymshark encountered during the Onyx collection launch, where bots quickly purchased all available items, leading to customer dissatisfaction. The piece explores the technical challenges faced by Gymshark and the subsequent customer outrage, highlighting the importance of robust e-commerce infrastructure in handling high-demand product releases.
5. <https://support.gymshark.com/en-US/article/fakes> - Gymshark's official support page addresses the issue of counterfeit Gymshark accounts and websites. It provides guidance on how to identify fake Gymshark advertisements and websites, emphasizing the importance of checking for the blue verified tick and ensuring the website URL is gymshark.com. The page also offers advice on reporting fake accounts and websites to protect consumers from fraud.
6. <https://www.gymshark.com/collections/onyx> - Gymshark's official Onyx collection page showcases the brand's physique-enhancing apparel line. The collection, after five years, is back by popular demand, offering a seamless, second-skin fit. The page features various products, including compression fit tops and muscle fit tops, designed to accentuate the wearer's physique. The Onyx collection is known for its sleek designs and high-performance materials.
7. <https://row.gymshark.com/blog/article/nyc-exclusive-event> - Gymshark's blog post details the exclusive pop-up event in New York City to celebrate the launch of the new Onyx collection. The event, held on May 3, 2025, at Cooper Classic Cars in the West Village, featured appearances from Gymshark athletes and offered fans early access to the Onyx V5 collection. The blog post provides event details, including time, location, and participating athletes.