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Be a Million Dollar Baby for a Monthly Fee

By RUTH LA FERLA

At the round of parties last Wednesday that precede New York Fashion Week, Stephen Knoll, the hairstylist, gave me the once over. "Handsome," he murmured. I neglected to tell him that most every-thing I had on was rented - leased with my objective of drawing covetous stares from my peers. Confessing would have spoiled the fun.

I was renting not just a look, but an experience: In this case the feeling on one-upmanship that comes with flaunting the season's most sought-after items. Many people today are more interested in collecting experiences than they are in actually owning the asset. Wealthy people in particular are tired of the "clutter" in their lives and don't want the hassles of ownership. More than possessions, they want variety.

In the last half-dozen years, consumer appetites for luxury goods have fueled a surge in the leasing of \$35,000-plus automobiles, private jets, and vacation homes. A small monthly membership fee, like that charged by the DVD leasing company Netflix, is providing access to more wares.

Today, luxury leasing has extended to fashion. And borrowed finery, once available primarily to celebrities, corporate big-wigs and society swans, is accessible to anyone willing to pay.

Consumers may find themselves seeking out online renters, like Borrowed Bling, a California supplier of rented estate-style "diamonds". On their website, www.BorrowedBling.com, begun in March, a scale of membership fees from about \$30 to \$100 a month supplies rentable jewels, from studs



For Rent

COAT AND SHOES Marc Jacobs coat and Lanvin T-strap pumps ensemble, from Albright Inc. Fashion Library for \$500 a week.

HANDBAG Muse bag by Yves Saint Laurent from Bag Borrow or Steal for \$60 a week.

EARRINGS Fake diamond Clear Cushion Cluster from Borrowed Bling for \$49.95 per month.

to full-on chandeliers.

The site averages about 4500 new visitors a month, said Carol Wexler, its founder. The client may be a young wife hoping to impress her husband's colleagues, Ms. Wexler said. More commonly, though, she is a high profile member of her community, involved in charity functions. "She might see the same group of people month after month, week after week," Ms. Wexler said. "And she probably owns her own jewels too. But unless you're Elizabeth Taylor", she added, "nobody has enough real jewelry to switch off if she sees the same people over and over."

The concept of a high end, temporary wardrobe was introduced more than a decade ago, when celebrities began strolling the

red carpet in borrowed, designer glitz. People are beginning to change their views about temporary ownership and it's an idea whose time has come. The borrowing customer is a very fashion - driven person, where the decision to rent is not based on thrift, but on a persistent hunger for novelty. For others renting is an elegant, and politically correct alternative to reckless shopping sprees.

Carol Wexler, at Borrowed Bling says, "Nobody has enough real jewelry to switch off if she sees the same people all the time."