

COLUMNS

Five PR essentials for luxury marketers

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Exclusivity you have it everyone else wants it.

Traditionally, this has been the approach of marketing luxury products.

Exclusivity still dominates the message, so understandably most marketers concentrate on this very appealing trait when selling high-end products or services.

You will be special, you will be desirable and feel this way, too, and your peers and the great mass of humanity will covet you if you buy a particular luxury product or service.

But the luxury market and the behavior of its audience are shifting: We are experiencing a wide-scale broadening of high-end goods and services.

Apple iPhones end up in the hands of millions of consumers who do not typically buy pricey electronics.

The Porsche Cayenne prowls U.S. highways and suburbs in far greater numbers than ever expected.

Prada is not only a rite of passage for the uber urban, but also for those in the fly-over states.

Luxury and its exclusivity are now within reach of the many not the few making it not so exclusive anymore.

For luxury brands, the path well-trodden is not necessarily the path best-travelled any longer. Consumers expect more and will continue to do so.

What is truly different or interesting about luxury brands these days when consumers have such easy access to them?

Are luxury brands still banking on heritage or scarcity?

Maybe it is time to think about a few more qualities.

In our Age of Available Affluence, luxury marketers need to ratchet up the creativity stakes when pitching their products.

Here are five ideas traits that identify luxury products and opportunities to distinguish and differentiate the brand from its competition.

1. Begin your own tradition: Exclusiveness is about creating a legacy

With the commoditization of formerly exclusive goods, a brand must distinguish itself from the competition by emphasizing the experience of owning it.

Have you noticed how exclusive Swiss watchmaker Patek Philippe whose new slogan I used as a title here expertly markets the timelessness of its timepieces? "You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the

next generation.”

In other words, you are not simply buying a product, but possessing an heirloom for generations to come, infinitely passing along the heritage and legacy of the owner.

My husband recently gave a very handsome Rolex Oyster Perpetual Datejust that once belonged to his father a gift of trust and time that a newer or fashionable brand, say, Toy could never reach in terms of emotional connection and family heritage.

The chance to own something that will be used, treasured and serve as a witness to history through generations is a powerful inducement. It is a testament to a luxury brand's staying power.

Is it any wonder that, despite my reference to a different brand, Patek Phillippe holds the world's record for most expensive watch ever sold?

2. Sir Ernest Shackleton in Burberry regalia: 1914: Tell a story. People love stories

Long before Burberry clothed the masses, its story sold the product.

From outfitting the British Army, to shielding Shackleton in the Antarctic, Burberry's story gave the brand both mystique and reputed quality. And nothing generates more buzz in the press than a good product story.

On his blog, marketing consultant Michael Cage relates a story of sitting next to a man on a plane who regaled him for a half-hour about the nine-month process it took for him to order, get fitted for, and finally claim a custom suit made in England.

It was not only the fine tailoring and uniqueness of the clothing that made the suit appealing for the man it was the tale he got to tell about where it came from.

In other words, find the story in your brand and you will find customers.

3. Hand crafted of the finest titanium in a small Alpine village: Traits that no one else can claim

The ubiquity of high-end products offers an opportunity to slant messages away from everyone else.

While toning shoes are by no means an example of a high-end product, they are a great example of every brand in the fitness category claiming exactly the same things. All that is left to compete on is price and the amount that each brand can spend on advertising.

Luxury marketers must think in reverse: emphasize the craftsmanship of the product and do not be shy about detailing how their products are made or services are provided.

Customers spending a sizeable chunk of their disposable income on luxury goods are attracted by products and services created with time, care and craftsmanship in mind.

Moreover, customers want to know that the product they are buying will not be found at high-street retailer H&M for a tenth of the price and available to all and sundry.

4. Longevity through quality: Take advantage of the planned disposability trend

Even the good stuff does not last long these days.

Once upon a time, luxury brands were automatically assumed to boast high quality and durability. No longer.

The planned obsolescence wave that has swept through low- and mid-level consumer products has started to wash over high-end brands as well.

A new BMW and others are good examples. Of course they are quality automobiles, but for how long?

No longer are these simply cars, but computers on wheels. Will the technology that dominates their operating systems be viable in three years, much less five or ten? Will they be worth owning once their computer systems are obsolete?

This increasing disposability opens a chance for luxury competitors to profit by pushing the quality aspect.

How many rival brands can say they are built to last for the consumer's lifetime? Probably not many. So feel free to let potential customers know how much higher on the longevity scale you stand.

5. The art of writing: Form beats function

All pens serve the same function, but Mont Blanc positions its writing instruments as works of art.

A Dell PC and an iMac basically do the same job, but the iMac is a beautifully designed, handsome piece of technology.

The iMac's rivals are essentially a series of boards and microchips in a plastic box.

We will not touch the endless PC vs. Mac quality debate here. Suffice it to say that it also plays a huge part in Apple's appeal.

The point is: luxury aficionados, although they might not acknowledge or even realize it, are buyers of art.

After all, the great draw of most luxury goods is their beauty. Shine a light on that in your PR campaigns and you will have a consumer lingering on your product and seriously considering whether to add it to their collection.

SO AS THE Age of Available Affluence takes grip on the world, the job of telling your target audience that they will be special, and they will be desirable has gotten tougher.

Think about these five traits and exploit the very best in your product, not only by paying homage to tradition and luxury values, but by using those values to generate a higher level of exclusivity for your brand.

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