

COLUMNS

Why luxury needs to go native

December 23, 2016



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By **Ben Young**

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For all of the forward progress on the technology and advertising front, one sector seems rather slow to adapt.

Luxury advertisers are still opting for print placements in the right magazines, where they are assured of the company they keep in terms of other brands, and are positioned in brand-safe environments. They have been doing it this way for ages.

There are obviously exceptions to this rule.

Brands such as Burberry and Gucci have been riding the bleeding edge of marketing, technology, personalization and experience. But when you zoom out to the entire sector, they represent the exception rather than the rule.

Safety match

There will be a bigger shift coming. But trying out new advertising platforms is one thing. Understanding which platform and technology preserve the image that luxury brands spend so much time and budget cultivating is another.

In the recent digital past, the formats were limited and ugly banner ads represented the antithesis of what luxury was all about.

To-date, many luxury brands were unable to replicate the impact and quality of print or television campaigns online. It did not feel premium or scarce enough.

There continue to be challenges. I saw pre-roll for a fancy Cartier ad before watching some link-bait fodder of a spider battle a swarm of bees on Digg.

Luxury requires finesse that other brands do not have to worry about in terms of retargeting and chasing people around the Web.

Programmatic lacks brand safety, in other words, making sure you do not end up retargeting consumers as they peruse the Drudge Report. Luxury brands need exclusive, rarified environments, even in digital.

When we realize these points, the conservatism mentioned above seems somewhat warranted.

New picture

As millennials grow up and account for an increasing amount of spend on luxury goods, the playbook needs to change as well.

Brands now need to release more than runway images. They need more content, and more varied content, to keep consumers engaged.

Millennials want to be told a story through a constantly refreshing narrative, rather than one campaign a season shot by an expensive photographer.

It is a steady drip feed of interesting content that elegantly comes together to serve a broader narrative about a brand.

Millennials are also actively blocking out other forms of advertising that is trying to reach them, evidenced by the continuing rise of ad blocking.

Fortunately, native advertising has quickly grown up in both sophistication and also ability to deliver high-quality stories with depth, integrated nicely within editorial environments.

The needle that brands must thread is brand-safe environments, with the same quality standards, environments and agencies that they are used to in print. Plus the ability to go deeper with their storytelling in an integrated way. And this is now possible.

What does the future look like? Let us look at a few forward looking campaigns of note:

Gucci and Cond Nast

Gucci has been quite progressive in all areas including marketing under the eye of creative director Alessandro Michele, with a \$2 million Cond Nast-branded content partnership that felt creatively inspired and worked across multiple properties, including the seemingly incongruent Pitchfork male millennials are an important part of its strategy.

Gucci president and chief executive Marco Bizzarri told the Business of Fashion, "Digital narrative whether through film, social media or native journalism is the way that millennials, in particular, like to be engaged today. [It] will certainly play an increasingly important part of our strategy going forward."

Park Hyatt and NYT Brand studio: Tastemakers

The Times Brand Studio is doing some of the best native content helped in part by built-in distribution from the publication itself.

The publication's recent "tastemakers" series with hotel chain Park Hyatt focuses on some of the elements that makes the brand unique, including the architect behind the iconic Park Hyatt Tokyo building, as well as contemporary art curators Cecilia Alemani and Massimiliano Gioni.

Mercedes and The Wall Street Journal Viewfinders

This was a well-executed travelogue, diving into cultural elements of the United States focused on lifestyle and design via an extended road trip in a C-series.

The picks are unusual and of editorial merit. It does not feel like a phoned-in piece of lazy advertorial. The inspiration and curation were sharp.

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