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Business at its best

5 ideas for luxury brands to boost ecommerce

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By Malinda Sanna

The good news for luxury brands is that consumers enjoy shopping more than ever the desire is there. But they have so many new, exciting ways of interacting with luxury brands that they may not be beating down the path to wander around Neiman Marcus anymore.

Consumers can curl up on the couch at 11 p.m. with a glass of wine and explore what Farfetch can bring them from boutiques in Europe, or an alert that they have set on TheRealReal for a Bulgari Bzero 1 ring that just became available in their size at half the price of retail. These experiences deliver the rarity and personal attention that makes luxury exciting.

What can predominantly bricks-and-mortar luxury monobrand retailers do to rev up the ecommerce engine?

Know your customer
Start with the incredible opportunity of personalization that exists with online shopping a huge missed opportunity.

Few online retailers are capitalizing on the technology that exists to deliver a personalized experience for their customers online.

Consumers love having a relationship with a sales associate at a luxury boutique who knows their size, what they like, who texts them with relevant, personalized news. So why cannot retailers make that level of personalization available for their online customers?

Even the most successful luxury online sites such as Net-A-Porter make women enter their sizes and favorite designers every time they shop.

Smart retailers will realize that if they draw a customer in to register with them online, they need to be good stewards of that information and use it to save their shoppers time and, even more importantly, make them feel recognized.

Forget about artificial intelligence. Most ecommerce Web sites are not even using basic intelligence and tracking tools to show people new choices inspired by their past purchases.

Here are five ideas to rev up the ecommerce engine:

1. Personalize. Consumers love online quizzes look at Buzzfeed so offer customers the chance to enter their personal style preferences and then create personalized capsule collections for them.

Services such as Stitchfix go too far for luxury fashion lovers because it leaves out the fun of self-styling, but a little help to narrow down the choices would be welcomed.

2. Humanize. Give valued customers the option of human interaction online. Most shopbots on ecommerce sites are horrible.

Luxury brands should experiment with putting sales associates online to answer questions live from customers. That would be radical.

What would really take it up to a new standard is if consumers can reach their own personal shopper on a Chanel, Louis Vuitton or Tiffany Web site.

Help customers build an ongoing relationship with a real person. Obviously they would not be able to be available 24/7, but it could follow the rhythm of a texting relationship, as consumers have with in-store sales associates.

3. Seduce. Use the Web site to tell a seductive story. What we hear from our luxury study participants is that they love the craftsmanship and attention to detail in luxury goods, the story behind the brands, the designer's inspiration all the behind the scenes romance.

If your ecommerce site is simply designed for transactions, then you are competing with Amazon, and you likely will not win that battle.

Create an immersive experience that invites the customer in and makes the story irresistible so that he or she feels the justification to pay the luxury price. Of course, it has to be easily navigable, and ideally also offer transactions and not just content.

4. Stoke collective buyer enthusiasm. Luxury retailers are so incredibly controlling of their dialogue with consumers that they miss out on the opportunity to create community online.

Multibrand retailers can learn lessons from Sephora, which gains loyalty from consumers by making customer reviews available online.

Monobrand retailers do not have to have an open-source policy and let anyone and everyone post comments on items purchased, but they could curate enthusiastic comments from customers, fostering a sense of shared passion.

Purseblog.com is a great example of the collective enthusiasm of luxury buyers. It is amazing to me that no luxury ecommerce site has channeled this kind of obsessiveness into sales.

5. Cross-pollinate. Borrow tactics from Instagram, which has captured the imagination of luxury shoppers.

Hire fashion bloggers to do "takeovers" of the site, shop the site or get celebrity ambassadors to blog on the site or endorse favorite items.

Consumers want more reality and color from luxury brands.

Give the designers behind the brands a voice on the site. Have them talk about pieces that are their favorites, or what inspired them to choose a color or fabric.

LUXURY WITHIN the world of ecommerce is still in its infancy.

Luxury retailers need to place themselves in the shoes of their customers. Empathize with their lack of time and their pent-up desire for a boutique experience.

Consumers tell us constantly that they would shop boutiques more if they had the time, so use the creativity inherent in these brands to create those benefits in an online experience.

Make it less robotic and generic and use the advancements of technology to create one-on-one experiences for customers. Do not treat them like a number.

Consumers want more than transactions. They want art, they want entertainment, they want detail and they want to feel that they can express themselves through their luxury choices, even if they are making the purchase online.

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