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How luxury brands can upgrade cross-channel services

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Customer expectations are higher than they have ever been in a time when every industry's landscape is fluid, constantly obstructed by change and inexorably chasing technology advancements. Nowhere is that more evident than in luxury retail.

Customers expect service and experience above all else. It is paramount to price, value and in some cases product. And expectations are advancing at rates that make catching up difficult for brands.

While luxury retailers cannot rely on promotions, discounts and lower price points, they do have an advantage with brand equity that they can harness to provide cross-channel consistency in service and customer experience.

Although most brands are stuck in the retail rut the monotonous repetition of promotion to drive sales luxury has fared well, staying above the fray and finding solid ground.

Luxury brands built strong foundations in service, branding, product focus and customer perception to overcome their lack of promotional content. Those foundations are now their strongest incentives: they can fortify their customer experiences across any channel by using their strongest assets to align with customer expectations.

However, the business still lags behind in a few important channels where luxury brands can further enhance their offerings.

Digital

Digital is no longer the Wild West with few rules governing measurement, ad placement and segmentation. Blanket targeting is over. Digital needs to take the next step and join the rest of the marketing world with better targeting, measurement and clarity.

The potential exists, and CRM tactics can help to pinpoint customers and provide much better options for personalization and segmentation. Luxury brands need to be at the forefront of that new level of targeting to align with customers who expect tailored communications based on needs, wants and history.

It is crucial that brands move to a one-to-one approach when advertisements are not promotional-centric.

High-level brand content simply will not cut it with customers and prospects in the consideration set. Motivating customers is not easy, but the closer that ads align with their propensities, the better chance they will buy.

A general rule is that the quicker brands can get customers the product, the higher chance they will make a transaction. So, transaction history is actually the best starting point to display targeted product.

The same can be said of browse behavior, but it gets more complex with previous transactions. Brands do not want to display a product that has already been purchased.

One of the best strategies is somewhat counter-intuitive.

Recent purchasers are in some ways the best source of new transactions. For most brands, they are more likely to purchase again in a shorter time frame, especially if they are targeted with lifecycle content.

There is no reason why digital cannot be a part of that lifecycle content if the data is readily available. Product recommendations on recent purchases are highly effective in other channels and should be just as effective in display, as well.

Ecommerce

Most retailers pay close attention to user experience and customer journey on their ecommerce sites.

There are two areas of focus that do not get enough attention for luxury brands, though: the homepage and product pages.

Do not underestimate the homepage's impact on customers. It is not just a spot to throw promotions at customers, which is often counterproductive for luxury brands.

The problem for luxury is that the homepage is often too high-level on branding, which is usually underwhelming with no connection to the customer. The adage still holds true: get product in front of customers as quickly as possible. Why wait?

And what has more brand equity than the items the company is most excited about? That is, after all, the reason those customers are on the site: to view product. Give them the experience that they are looking for, guide their shopping behavior and put the best products in front of them early.

For product pages, there needs to be an evolution in customer experience. Luxury brands need to offer a level of content that other brands are not providing. That means the best product photography possible: on-figure, product flats and detail shots. Photography is everything.

It also means taking the next step in the process and moving to product videos, as well.

Customers do not just want to see the product. They want to understand the way it moves when they are wearing it. If the brand is selling that product at 40 percent off, maybe it does not need video, but luxury brands do not have that safety net. They need every incentive possible to push customers into higher full-priced items.

Store transformation

Digital channels are not the only ones that can improve the luxury shopper experience. Stores have some major options to improve service, as well. And there is one area, in particular, that should be a focal point for brands.

Data is the key, but it needs to be used in a service-driven approach. Every associate now has a tablet at his or her fingertips. It has so much potential just waiting to be used with customer transactions. For most of the retail industry, the tablet is exclusively used for returns and omnichannel purchases to make the experience less obtrusive.

However, for luxury retailers, the tablet is the impetus for guiding customers through the store, finding relevant products, sizing, making the product experience more enjoyable and making checkout fast and easy.

Brands do not need digital displays. They simply need to empower associates with knowledge to drive customer service to new heights.

LUXURY RETAIL is a different breed from the rest of the industry. It exists in its own microcosm, with different issues and solutions.

Where most retailers rely on promotions and discounts, luxury has its own currency in brand equity and service.

While new possibilities are always emerging, service and product always need to be at the forefront to elevate

...time when professionals are aware of emerging, online and product usage needs to be at the forefront to generate customer satisfaction.

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