

RETAIL

## Creating the sound of luxury

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By **Kristen Lueck**

Luxury, particularly the world of high-end, exclusive fashion, jewelry, cars and other indulgences, has always leaned into the most cutting-edge innovations to keep up with the needs of their clientele whether it be the new frontier of **NFTs**, tapping into the world of **reselling**, reimagining the **retail experience** or investing in **pop-ups**.

Yet, when it comes to the audio-first era that is upon us, luxury brands are mostly silent. In moments such as voice skills or call centers, where visual branding is taken away, how do you still take credit for what should be an unforgettable experience? When a client first walks through your retail doors, how are you sounding as the brand says "hello" and "welcome"?

Whether you are strategic about it or not, the music and sound associated with your environment your brand is telling a story.

Sound is leading that story too given it is the sense we respond to the fastest, organizing the assumptions of the rest of our senses after it.

This is great news if you have carefully curated every aspect of the experience, tying it together as if with a red thread of audio. If not, it could be disastrous for a customer's ability to engage.

In fact, we know from SonicPulse Research, an audio research methodology created in partnership with **Made Music Studio** and **Sentient Decision Science**, that subconscious emotional response to sound is 86 percent correlated with the conscious desire to engage with or avoid an experience.

Here are the ABCs of how sound can amplify experiences within the luxury industry: atmosphere, bridge and consistency.

### Atmosphere

Sound can create atmosphere.

Understanding your clientele and the emotional experiences they are looking for is an important first step when designing audio. How will they feel when they first interact with your brand and how do you want them to feel over the course of that interaction?

An example of this is a large retail flagship location located on Michigan Avenue in Chicago.

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knowing that its shoppers would enter after being bombarded by the noise of the city streets, the idea to create a palette cleansing welcome experience brought to life a quadrophonic audio installation that played in the foyer.

This moment in the customer's journey was a place to stop, take a deep breath, and be relaxed by the gentle flares and flourishes of sound above.

Not only that, but employees enjoyed the calming ambience, too. And because of the multichannel system, the same sounds never appeared together twice, eliminating a common problem employee audio fatigue.

There is an opportunity for customers to feel seen and moved, simply by the audio choices of a retail environment.

In 2019, Cartier opened a new **London flagship**, designed to be more like a private home than a typical retail store. The designers knew that their clients were looking for a unique and memorable experience above all, as visiting is something of which most consumers dream.

Here is a great opportunity to think about how sound can add to that experience how can the soundtrack of the space create a unique sense of intimacy, make the environment feel lived in and comfortable, but still elevated?

Having a strategic music supervision program, perhaps one that is even day-parted or seasonally changed, can help answer some of these questions.

Buildings are not the only places to find audio reframing how we experience the space.

Automobiles have been using sound for decades to create luxurious experiences, including in the simple **sound of a door closing**.

This designed audio cue lets you know you are in for a premium and well-made driving experience. Given that it is one of the first audio cues that a prospective buyer hears in the showroom, it is an important audio moment to get right.

Even cars who would not be considered a luxury purchase have learned to incorporate the right door sound, to reinforce the idea of safety and reliability.

## Bridge

Sound can bridge the digital and physical.

Burberry is experimenting with a new **social media concept retail store**. It allows guests to earn richer experiences with the brand by the depth of their interaction, as well as earning social currency along the way.

Experiences that you have with the British brand's app come alive in person and that is a ripe opportunity for sound to continue to play a role, bridging the gap between physical and digital.

Not only can sounds make your brand distinct and memorable, in digital experiences such as apps, custom user interface sounds can increase product learning curve 28 percent.

Examples of this type of bridge could include the same "checkout" sound when purchasing from the app or in-person, playlists as content on the app but playing overhead in retail, and reincorporating any sounds from the app on digital kiosks or navigational tools within the store.

Imagine favoriting an item online with a feedback sound that you also hear when you pick up the items or try them on in-store.

In this excerpt from composer Joel Beckerman's *The Sonic Boom: How Sound Transforms the Way We Think, Feel, and Buy*, he explores creating iconic experiences, especially in a digital age.

"In an age where we're buying more and more online, digital stores should be more deliberate about their use of sound," Mr. Beckerman said.

"What if online stores played a sound when you unlocked a special VIP experience or discounts on luxury items?" he said. "As long as you were already in a receptive frame of mind, the right sound could subtly nudge you along in the shopping experience."

## Consistency

Sound can build consistency across touch points.

An important consideration of customers loyalty to brand is its trustworthiness.

One way to build that trust is through consistency, including the consistency of sound.

While you may have retail stores, advertising and social marketing covered, there's one touch point that is often overlooked: call centers. This important moment on the customer journey, where often moods are less than positive depending on the reason for the call, can be transformed through the power of sound.

A study conducted between Made Music Studio and [The Decision Lab](#) found that by curating the right music for on-hold, specifically an ambient soundscape, perceived waiting time can be reduced.

You can now experience [breakfast at Tiffany](#) at cafs across the country, a new touch point that allows clients to linger longer with the brand and enjoy new offerings.

With these new touch points come the opportunity to build consistency, something so well done with the Tiffany Blue.

What about sound and music? How does the overhead music of the caf tie together with that of the retail experience, or the on-hold when calling to make a reservation versus calling to make a private appointment in the store? These are all places to consider when designing for audio experiences.

SOUND DESIGN MUST be human centric, functional, but with an emotional payoff. something accomplishable as you consider the atmosphere, the bridging and the consistency of your audio design.

According to a study by [Motista](#), emotionally-connected customers remain loyal to brands for longer and spend up to two times more in a year.

The power of sound has the ability to build and maintain that emotional connection.

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