

COLUMNS

Creating engaging online experiences for fashion brands

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By **Fadi Shuman**

In January this year ecommerce sales rose strongly despite a slump in high street spending, making it the only part of the British retail market to report growth in the first two weeks of January, according to CBI figures.

However, although the latest IMRG Capgemini eRetail Sales Index showed that ecommerce sales rose by 17 percent in 2011, online sales still only account for 17 percent of the total British retail market. It sounds small but it is a considerable sized chunk, and all the stats point to a steady incline in online spending, but what can online retailers do to encourage this trend?

Particularly with fashion retail, successful online selling is closely tied with how well the merchandise is presented.

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Bringing the in-store experience online has been something that ecommerce has worked hard to resolve from the start, and the technology available is steadily coming inline with this expectation.

Luxury Italian designer brand Salvatore Ferragamo recently launched a "Style Yourself" application, offering the users the chance to try out different outfits on a model, layering clothes and accessories and viewing the outfit from different angles.

The app effectively gives the customer a chance to become the stylist. Often when visiting a fashion Web site, the season's new look will be presented to the customer with clear suggestions of how to build the outfit to create the desired look.

Nothing wrong with helping the client with some creative suggestions, but how about empowering them to be creative themselves, to find their own style and originality?

Apparel label Brooks Brothers recently launched a customization feature on its Web site, with a "make-your-own suit and shirt" program available across hundreds of patterns, colors and weaves.

As well as adding an element of convenience to the shopper's visit, offering the buyer the chance to customize their own purchases is a great way to personalise the buying experience and increase brand loyalty.

Do customers prefer this kind of format as opposed to 2D imagery? Certainly they do.

THESE SORTS OF experiences are the future of fashion retail.

Customers are far more likely to stay on a Web site which has frequently updated content and apps with which they can play.

The key now is to empower customers by allowing them the freedom to be creative. Allowing the customer to create

The key now is to empower customers by allowing them the freedom to be creative. Allowing the customer to create bespoke experiences for themselves is the future of fashion ecommerce.

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