

COLUMNS

Chanel vs. Bergdorf Goodman: Twitter personas and the perception of luxury

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By AN AMERICAN MARKETER COLUMNIST

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Faster than you can say "bit.ly". Democratic. Often unedited, frequent and mass: Twitter is five things luxury is not. But, of course, everyone does it, and two marketers, Chanel (1.5 million-plus followers) and Bergdorf Goodman (174,650 followers), are tweeting in ways so different you would be surprised to know they were both in the luxury space.

Though it is inherently risky to compare brand to retailer, and though Bergdorf's tweets read like a wink and a toast at best, it is nevertheless revealing of how the luxury retailer could learn from the writing and the strategy behind Chanel's tweets.

High five

Chanel follows no one on Twitter. If you know one thing about Twitter, you know that following people is the ticket to love. It means you care, you listen, and you are just generally nice.

Listening does not appear to be Chanel's bag, and I would bet the followers do not care. They do not love Chanel because it is chatty: They love Chanel because associating with the brand offers rich club membership.

Aside from the inherent exclusivity of following no one, another reason for Chanel's success is that the brand has avoided the trappings of the "Twitter persona": that phenomenon that has fictitious young new entities OscarPRGirl for Oscar de la Renta, GetScattered for Bergdorf taking on the cloak of the storied brand faster than you can say OMG.

Goodness

Bergdorf's tweets are written from the first-person point of view of a friendly, fun gal (#GetScattered) who documents her day at the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, her appreciation of her (probably very nice) friend, who also loves orchids.

This gal has an enviable lifestyle: she is most likely in her 20s or early 30s, generously retweets loads of conversations, and is tied in to Instagram and Facebook like a good social media disciple. She follows 1,141 people. To compare retailer to retailer, Barneys follows 1,553 people and has fewer than 200,000 followers.

The problem with Bergdorf's tweets: you are often forgetting you are reading about Bergdorf, mostly because the tweets do not make you feel like you are in the company of an institution that has inspired everyone from Lauren Bacall (see "How to Marry a Millionaire") to Jay-Z (see "30 Something").

Instead, it offers the reader retweeted conversations with ordinary strangers out there who do not particularly have much to say. It genuflect effusively five consecutive tweets about Isabel Toledo?.

And the brand retweets fashionista after fashionista excited that the Bergdorf documentary is coming. The fact that Bergdorf is giddy that it is giddy casts a shadow on Bergdorf's aura.

Though it is likeable, supportive, funny and kind, this persona means the brand loses its own personality.

Straitjacket

On the other hand, Chanel's minimal writing lets the product speak for itself.

The content keeps the Chanel aficionado informed of the glamorous intrigue they want to know: like who is wearing Chanel to what parties, what new jewelry has just hit the market, and how "Secretly Gabrielle Chanel illuminates the darkest period of her childhood."

If the reader has not bought Chanel yet, there is enough emotive content here to make her ready to leap at the first chance.

Not only that, but it gives Chanel the chance, strategically for the lower-priced items ("Simple. Natural. Intuitive. Chanel introduces a new approach to healthy glow makeup. #LESBEIGES #CHANEL").

Egregious self-promotion perhaps, but then there is the tweet about the new Little Black Jacket, which links to a film about its making and its quality so that all the 1.5 million remember it when they are ready to splurge.

This is not being crass or commercial. It is having the right mix of editorial content and actionable, salable product mentions.

Pitter scatter

Ultimately, the elements that would help the Bergdorf tweets feel more Bergdorf-y are the same phenomena that just may motivate a person to buy her summer statement pieces at Bergdorf: brand voice and an emphasis on exquisite finery.

After all, an unspeakable exquisiteness falls upon you when you enter those doors off Fifth Avenue, and peppered amongst the tweets could be more of a sense of that quality and heritage and from-the-heavens exaltation about all things gold, silk and leather.

This is about brand voice, story and finery: all that which has made customers justify their purchases and make repeat purchases for all these years.

Social media has changed a lot, but it has not changed the feeling that belonging to an exclusive club feels more worth the price than belonging to a club that would have everyone as a member.

And here is where GetScattered gets it right, really right: when she tweets with elevated and polite humor that more or less all 174,650 can relate to ("Dear New York weather, I believe we've come to a sartorial impasse. It's time you get your act together").

When she treats you like you are a member of a special club with a password ("May 3, #GetScattered").

When she appreciates a non-fashion person appreciating something that is presumably to be appreciated: "I like your shoes... they're like.... cool?" guy on the elevator.")

Incidentally, these tweets are retweeted more often than others. Here, the voice seems to be that of the brand itself.

THERE IS something to be said for using social media to integrate a brand into a person's lifestyle. But when that means forgetting about the brand's life itself, the message gets lost and perhaps customers do as well.

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