

COLUMNS

Survey the luxury brand by its weakest point of execution

April 23, 2013



By [Jason B. Cohen](#)

As a luxury brand, it is easy to rest on the laurels of everything you have done right. Maybe your retail strategy is exceptional, or you have launched a cutting-edge experiential Web site.

But when it comes to surveying the state of your luxury brand, it is invaluable to step back and judge your brand the way the luxury consumer will by its weakest point of execution.

Friendly help

Luxury consumers have a clear set of expectations. They consistently reward brands that deliver exceptional products, services and experiences.

On the flip side, like all consumers, they are quick to turn to social media when a brand does not measure up, and luxury brands have a lot to measure up to.

A quick glance at Facebook or Yelp will confirm that a mediocre experience rarely warrants a review. Indeed, only the incredible or the incredibly disappointing earn mentions.

Luxury brands, which must carefully consider every angle of execution, are all too aware that a single scathing remark can easily negate five rave reviews.

So, where have we seen luxury brands that otherwise get it right go wrong?

Incongruous brand partnerships: Would a AAA Four Diamond hotel partner with a fast food franchise? Remember, not every opportunity is right for your brand.

Lowbrow "sale" messaging: Would an iconic Fifth Avenue flagship store in New York advertise a "Blowout Sale"? While to some extent discounting is a reality of almost every brand, there is a right and a wrong way to go about it.

Inconsistent communication around a single concept: Often in the luxury auto space, careful consideration is given to every aspect of curating a product's identity.

Despite all that care, that same luxury car sometimes ends up on display in your local mall. Take care not to contradict your own messaging.

Poor taste: Off-color humor or pointed politics can easily alienate many people.

These gaffes are the equivalent of walking into an iconic luxury boutique, having a memorable experience with a representative, finding the ultimate piece of couture and then being handed the garment in a crumpled plastic bag without tissue. One element can ruin it all.

Choo in

With pitfalls lurking, we see top luxury brands working hard and being careful to get it right every single time. Sounds smart, but, as a result, an equally dangerous trend has emerged: Luxury brands are consistently late to the game, letting fear of failure deter them from strategic innovation.

So, what happens when half of your competition is standing at the edge of the water, afraid to dive in? A crowded space becomes less crowded, offering enormous opportunity.

For example, the digital / mobile / social space feels pretty risky to many luxury brands. Technology is moving at warp speed, so the platforms of today may change even as you develop a strategy.

Still, it is clear that luxury brands must accept that the digital space is just another touch point in which to excel and grow, or fail.

Look at Jimmy Choo's digital success. It invested in a Facebook presence and gained a following of 1 million fans. And it does not let those fans sit idle. Its "Trainer Hunt" launched across Facebook, foursquare and Twitter, was covered on 250 different blogs and was the most clicked story on PRWeek's news site.

Through a smart digital strategy, Jimmy Choo reinforced for its current and aspirational consumers that its product is to be coveted.

Another brand that pulled ahead through innovation is BMW.

The German automaker's "BMW Genius Everywhere" strategy arms brand experts with iPads and a deep technical knowledge of the product. It has made it clear to the consumer that these experts are available to provide information, and if consumers would like to make a purchase, a salesperson can assist them.

The BMW strategy is really genius. It is on-the-spot content marketing selling without overtly selling. Its risk seems to be paying off with the program now slated for implementation in the United States in early 2014.

SO WHAT IS a luxury brand to do when there are so many ways to go wrong? It is critical to have well-articulated branding documents including brand DNA, mission and vision, and to make sure those documents are well understood companywide.

With this groundwork in place, when one of these opportunities comes about, you are ready to react in the right, on-brand way rather than doing something that may cause more harm than good.

Jason B. Cohen is executive vice president of creative at [The O Group](#), New York. Reach him at jcohen@ogroup.net.

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