

MULTICHANNEL

Allowing others to tell your brand story adds authenticity

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Dolce & Gabbana used influencer and blogger Shea Marie to promote its Light Blue fragrance

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK – While print still has a firm place in the media mix for luxury marketers, online content and social media allow for new ways to tell a brand's story, according to panelists at Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2014 on Sept. 9.

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Where brands used to be expected to come up with content each season, consumers now have an appetite for branded content on a consistent basis. Keeping heritage at the forefront and allowing influencers to share their take on a brand can help brands keep up with this demand and retain a level of authenticity.

"I'm a firm believer in authenticity when it comes to luxury, but also innovation," said Anthony Cennamo, publisher of [WSJ. magazine](#), New York. "Marketers are showing authenticity with innovation at the same time.

"But what's most important, a lot of the luxury marketers that we work with, and we work with every single one of them, the celebration of heritage is always extremely important to them," he said.

"So brands who are paying homage to that heritage to set themselves apart are always

ahead of their competitors."

Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2014 was organized by Luxury Daily.

Storytelling

Last week, ForbesLife, expanded its digital footprint by launching a dedicated Web site for its luxury lifestyle publication.

Now in its 25th year of coverage, ForbesLife focuses on topics and interests geared toward a predominantly male audience. The digital extension of ForbesLife will give the publication the opportunity to expand its coverage, while not dismissing its core readership ([see story](#)).



ForbesLife homepage

This online hub for the publication recognizes that the luxury audience is both male and female, without losing the male readers it has always had.

ForbesLife editor Michael Solomon said that while the Web site was being designed, a lot of attention was paid to its appearance.

The Wall Street Journal's WSJ. magazine's Mr. Cennamo, has seen advertisers use an omnichannel approach, mixing media buys in the newspaper, magazine and online.

From his perspective, Mr. Cennamo has seen a thriving luxury market.

Forty-six percent of the advertisers in The Wall Street Journal's WSJ. magazine's September issue were new to the publication, contributing to the imprint's largest page count in its six-year history.

The 176-page September "Women's Style" issue has 90.08 advertising pages, up from last year's 72.56 pages, with a 41 percent increase year-on-year in fashion and luxury ad pages ([see story](#)).



Chanel ad in WSJ magazine September issue

Helping brands keep up with the consistent demand for content, a problem for many luxury marketers, is influencer marketing.

Working in digital media, Style Coalition pairs brands with its network of 350 influencers who have a combined audience of 100 million on blogs and social channels. Some of the clients are magazines owned by Hearst and Condé Nast, which give access to advertisers to have influencers to create custom media.

Contrary to the idea among luxury brands that this type of marketing will not reach the right audience, 25 percent of the blog readers engaged with these influencers have a household income of \$100,000 or more.

“At some point online influencers come in because they can help you tell your story without sounding too promotional, without pushing the product,” said Yuli Ziv, founder/CEO of [Style Coalition](#), New York.



From left: Anthony Cennamo, Michael Solomon, Ted Moncreiff, Yuli Ziv and Dalia Strum

When planning content, Ted Moncreiff, editor of [Bloomberg Pursuits](#), New York, said he focuses on the return on investment for a given product when covering luxury, since the readership wants to know what a particular item will give them, whether monetary or experiential.

"It's critical, and I think information has become the point of the realm, and storytelling has become the point of the realm," Mr. Moncreiff said.

"I don't know that any of us need more stuff," he said. "I think there's a point where you want things to be more than just a thing, you want it to represent a memory, a human endeavor.

"When you see what goes into a fine timepiece, you understand that there's a whole human being history behind that, and that makes it live in a more multi-dimensional way than just a thing."

Seasonal planning

Going into the holiday season, the panel was optimistic about consumer confidence.

There are 26 shopping days this holiday season, one more than last year. Panelists agreed that this additional time will make a difference, but brands should not delay.

Dalia Strum, professor at the [Fashion Institute of Technology](#) and founder of [Dalia Inc.](#), noted that brands should make sure they have a mobile-optimized Web site in place before the holiday season, since 43 percent of traffic comes from mobile, citing a report from Internet Retailer.

It's not too early to prepare.

"As we head into holiday, I've been getting pitched on holiday ideas since Easter," ForbesLife's Mr. Solomon said.

Partnerships

In addition to influencer marketing, luxury brands have been warming up to user-generated content.

For instance, Italian apparel and accessories label Tod's is putting the spotlight on stylish fans with a user-generated microsite centered on its Gommino loafer.

Tod's "Dots of Life" campaign asks consumers to submit photos of themselves wearing the Gommino, which are then compiled by the brand into an online gallery. This campaign will give fans of the brand a moment in the spotlight, while also showcasing the many varied wardrobes the shoes fit into ([see story](#)).

"You want people talking about your brand," FIT's Ms. Strum said. "You don't want to keep pushing your brand, you need other people supporting and advocating for your brand.

"It's really going to be about visual storytelling, because people love images," she said.

"We connect to them on a different level than we do contextually.

"It's not just about your product. It's also about the experience that surrounds your product and can people envision your product in their lifestyle."

Final Take

Sarah Jones, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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