

MULTICHANNEL

Luxury brands work better together than alone

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Handbag available on Crest & Co.

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK – Luxury brands and retailers can benefit more from joining together, according to panelists at Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2014 Sept. 9.

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For both established and start-up retailers, being part of a larger luxury community comes with perks, including access, protection and awareness building. Independent brands may want to think of finding strategic partnerships for support.

“What was once independence has become isolation, and luxury brands isolated are in the worst position,” said Chris Ramey, president of [Affluent Insights](#) and founder of [The Home Trust](#), Miami, FL.

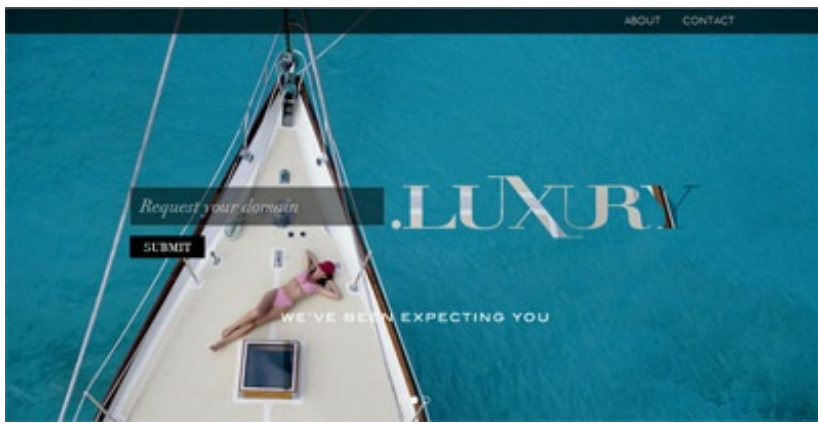
Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2014 was organized by Luxury Daily.

Coming together

One of the ways in which luxury is coming together is through a more specific top-level domain, .Luxury, which gives brands the opportunity to further define their status online.

Chanel, Gucci, Cartier, Valentino, Van Cleef & Arpels and Bulgari purchased .Luxury domains during a 60-day period where only trademarked brands could register ([see](#)

story).



Screenshot of .luxury Web site homepage

By registering for a domain with .Luxury, brands will get better protection against cybersquatting than they would with a generic domain, for instance .com, since the company can better control who purchases domains. Another discourager is the price point for registration, \$600-800.

Coming together online will also alter how easy it is for consumers to find luxury online. For instance, to reach consumers researching properties in a particular city, a real estate marketer could purchase a domain with the city name and homes at .Luxury, which will help their Web site rank better in search results.

Bringing together a number of properties, Leading Hotels of the World vets new additions and current hotels with an ongoing assurance process. The 430 current members get assistance from the parent company, which sends them business.



Pousada do Porto Freixo Palace Hotel National Monument, a new member of Leading Hotels

David Rompf, senior director of loyalty at Leading Hotels of the World, said that he notices that it is not the over-the-top experiences, such as safaris, that leave an impact, but rather the interaction with the hotel staff and the room.

“We want to ensure that that experience is world class across the organization,” Mr. Rompf said.

Also bringing together an exclusive list of brands is The Home Trust, which is a network of home furnishing makers.

One of the trends that Mr. Ramey has seen is that the first pages of advertising in traditionally interior-focused publications, such as Architectural Digest, are dominated by non-home brands. He mentioned that those that advertise will be in a better place in consumers' minds.



From left: Eleven James' Randy Brandoff, Crest & Co.'s Nima Abbassi, The Home Trust's Chris Ramey, Leading Hotels of the World's David Rompf and .Luxury's Monica Kirchner

Providing a platform for purveyors of exclusive luxury goods, Crest & Co. often finds brands that are not selling with other retailers.

Crest & Co. relies on storytelling and a passion for its exclusive product ranges rather than leveraging mainstream luxury brand names to sell its wares to a membership of 2,500 individuals, of which the top 50 have a combined wealth of more than \$40 billion.

When sourcing goods, Crest & Co.'s curators focus on an item's heritage in terms of quality and craftsmanship over its association with a brand to ensure its consumers have access to the most authentic luxury goods available ([see story](#)).

Crest & Co.'s members-only ecommerce site provides a platform for brands to reach wealthy individuals who may not have heard of them before. This December, the retailer will bring its business model offline, with a pop-up shop on 57th Street in New York.

Eleven James focuses on giving consumers access to a range of brands, and also serves as an entrypoint to luxury watches.

Eleven James, a membership-based horology club, is restructuring the traditional in-store experience by altering how consumers interact with watchmakers before the point of sale is finalized.

With a monthly membership fee beginning at \$249, Eleven James also opens up the watch industry to consumers who may be horology enthusiasts, but are priced out of the joys of ownership or those looking to add more variety to their collection ([see story](#)).

The club's main focus now is making sure they do not dilute their service as they grow.

Service first

Customer service is going to be key for retailers, as consumers become more demanding.

For instance, Switzerland's Jaeger-LeCoultre is fortifying relationships with consumers by promoting its high level of customer service when maintenance on a timepiece is needed.

Given the price of Jaeger-LeCoultre timepieces, it is essential that the watchmaker reassures the consumer that if repairs are needed, the watch is in good hands.

Reliable customer service procedures also help the consumer justify the price spent on a luxury good, regardless of the sector ([see story](#)).

"If you continue to make beautiful products, you're always going to find a way," said Randy Brandoff, founder of [Eleven James](#), New York.

Final Take

Sarah Jones, editorial assistant on [Luxury Daily](#), New York

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