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How should luxury brands prepare for Valentine's Day?

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Although some affluent consumers see Valentine's Day as a chance for jewelry and candy companies to make money, luxury brands think outside of the proverbial chocolate box in order to reap the benefits of star-crossed lovers and their wallets.

After the December holiday aftermath, luxury brands barely have time to cool down before Feb. 14, when most are bombarded with eager consumers striving to find the perfect gift for their special someone. Luxury brands should take advantage of this by launching special digital, print and out-of-home advertising campaigns to woo potential customers.

“Valentine’s Day is an especially important holiday for luxury brands as it is a time when consumers are looking for a gift or gesture that makes someone feel truly special,” said Laura Marriott, CEO of NeoMedia, New York. “Since many luxury brands are based around exclusivity and indulgence it can often make them the ultimate source of Valentine’s Day gift inspiration.”

Digital advertising

Last year, luxury brands pushed their marketing strategies globally. They started with

centralized English language Web sites with an ad extension towards European and Asian markets.

Some other luxury brands like Gingerlilly focused on online press and search engine optimization, as well as testing markets in paid search and display and developing localized Web sites for different countries.

This year, brands are expected to use social and mobile in their Valentine's Day digital strategies.

“Luxury brands now recognize the benefits of using social media for exclusive access, exclusive experiences and exclusive information,” said Philip Stelter, deputy managing director at Unique Digital, London. “This product exclusivity can tie perfectly into mobile through targeted banner and search advertising ads so long as brands following the online process where landing pages and microsites are used to promote that offer.

“Navigating through mobile Web sites and indeed apps are still relatively tricky compared to the online world so brands must ensure that campaign messages are consistent from initial banner ad through to destination,” he said.

Print advertising

Print media has always been one of the key factors for Valentines Day-themed advertising, but industry experts have been finding that luxury brands are starting to use the medium in a new way.

Luxury brands are using print as a vehicle to connect consumers to mobile and digital promotions and advertising.

“The key for 2011 is for luxury brands to integrate their print, digital and mobile advertising strategies effectively,” NeoMedia’s Ms. Marriott said. “Print ads will become more interactive and targeted in 2011, with the use of mobile call to actions such as mobile bar codes and SMS short codes becoming increasingly frequent and well recognized – taking the now traditional URL one step further to allow customers to interact wherever and whenever they are, even on impulse.”

Luxury brands that employ the use of mobile bar codes in print ads find that this is an ideal way of informing purchase decisions and incentivizing customers, as well as providing key product information or strategic offers, which could drive Valentine's Day purchase intent.

Brands are also able to use them to collect vital data about their audience in order to tailor future campaigns to even greater effect.

Out-of-home ads

Outdoor advertisements tend to reach more affluent consumers who are active and away from home often. Luxury brands rely on out-of-home marketing to communicate salient information about products and services, especially to influence the purchase decisions

of consumers in the period leading up to Valentine's Day.

Automotive brands such as Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz, Lexus, BMW and Rolls-Royce tend to rely on out-of-home advertisements around Valentine's day and rely on the medium as a core element with a broader ad strategy.

"Luxury jewelry and apparel brands also depend on the strength of out of home advertising to reach consumers and include Rolex and Giorgio Armani," said Stephen Freitas, chief marketing officer of the Outdoor Advertising Association of America, Washington, DC. "Out of home advertising can express the simplest sentiment with powerful reach and sustained frequency and that's a reason why some luxury brands use the medium this time of year."

Does Valentines Day matter to all luxury brands?

Consumers are more susceptible to search for a luxury item during Valentine's Day, since the holiday is known for indulgence and extravagance. Affluent consumers likely make more extravagant purchases for their loved ones on Valentine's Day.

Although wealthy consumers are more likely to buy luxury items throughout the year, Valentine's Day is the one time of year where non-affluent consumers are also willing to buy a luxury product.

Luxury marketers need to tailor messages to the every day person during this time of the year when superfluous money is willing to be spent.

However, the holiday does not have to deal solely with jewelry and watch brands. Many other luxury brands have put their hearts on their sleeves in celebration of the most romantic day of the year.

"Valentine's Day is all about romance, from plush hotels to expensive chocolates and jewelry," Unique Digital's Mr. Stelter said. "Brands who have been successful have created something unique for the holiday.

"Last year Chanel created purses and accessories with heart shaped charms and Louis Vuitton did something similar in creating a small range of accessories that were Valentine themed," he said. "Gucci normally features an entire Valentine's Day collection, including shoes, scarves and even key rings.



Valentine's Day-themed Gucci accessories

“The key with these themed gifts is exclusivity, they are normally produced in small lots, making them even more desirable as gifts.”

Final take

Bluefly uses celebrity endorsements to talk about its Valentine's Day campaigns