

INTERNET

Pinterest boards should be extension of merchandising, says Saks exec

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Promotional image for SaksStyle

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK – Marketers should think about Pinterest boards as extension of their merchandising to drive sales from the platform, according to panelists at Luxury Interactive 2014 on Oct. 15.

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Even if brands believe they don't have a Pinterest strategy or presence developed, they are on the platform involuntarily as customers pin items they love to their own accounts, which then spread through further shares. Tapping into what is popular on social media, particularly Pinterest, can help a retailer market and sell its products to an audience that is 70 percent female.

"Pinterest by default is about action, whether that's building a board or buying something, that platform runs to move people to do something," said Qianna Smith, director of social media at [Saks Fifth Avenue](#), New York.

"So we monetize, we inspire, we definitely track demand through coded links to see what moves our community," she said. "But I also think there is a bigger story there, because for us it's about brand awareness."

Linking social to shopping

Due to the lack of control a brand has, sometimes products linked become outdated or sold out while they are still floating out on social media.

“When a product becomes no longer available, that becomes a dead link on your Web site, which previously didn’t matter,” said Deb Berman, vice president of client success, [Curalate](#), New York.

“Now it’s the equivalent of me walking into the Fendi store on 57th street and being turned around and pushed out the door,” she said. “That would never happen, but it’s happening on social all the time.”



Panelists, from left: Deb Berman, Qianna Smith and Emily Culp

Therefore, it is important to pay attention and listen to consumers and ensure that the click-through from a given link takes consumers to an effective ecommerce page, rather than a broken page with a sold out item. Instead, a brand can keep consumers on its site through similar product recommendations or redirecting them to the homepage.

Rebecca Minkoff releases about four or five boards per season, and uses them as “little stores.”



Rebecca Minkoff

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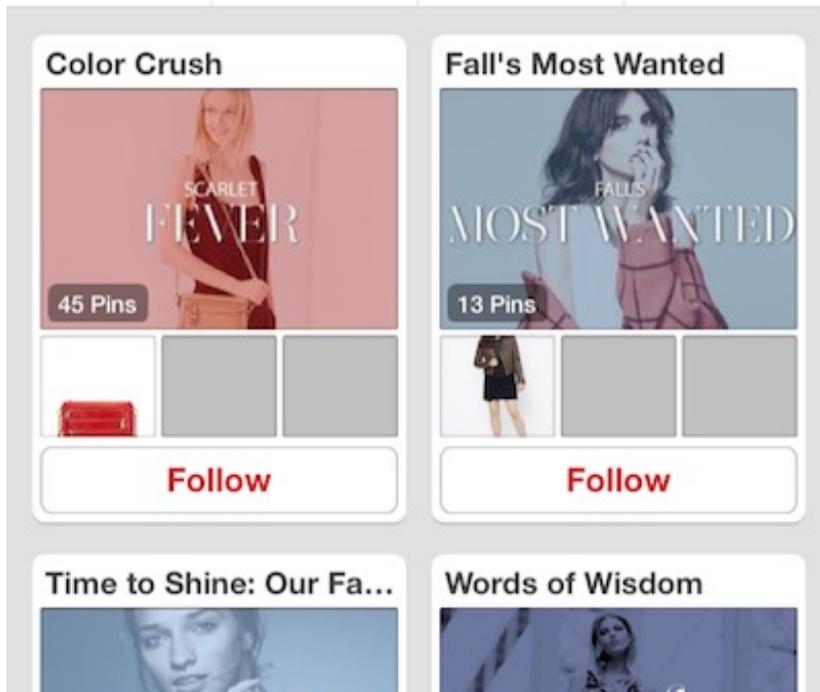
A peek into the world and inspirations of fashion designer Rebecca Minkoff

5.6k
Pins

363
Likes

64.7k
Followers

140
Following



Rebecca Minkoff Pinterest

In addition to selling merchandise, Pinterest is also a way for brands to conduct market research. If Rebecca Minkoff sees that a particular handbag from multiple seasons ago is trending on social media, they might use that information to reintroduce that style or update it.

“To me, it’s a series of microdecisions, it’s not waiting for the perfect pie-chart or the beautiful graph of some sort,” said Emily Culp, senior vice president of ecommerce and omnichannel marketing at [Rebecca Minkoff](#), New York.

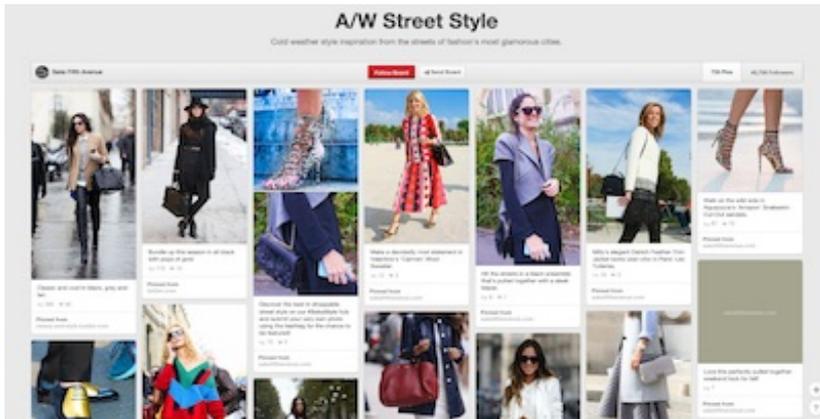
“You’re making on-the-fly decisions based on what your consumers are telling you,” she said.

Also using a seasonal approach, Saks builds Pinterest boards based on events or holidays, and then renames them to give them a new life and context, since the products are still relevant.

On top of a place to market products available online, Pinterest is a place for brands to communicate an inspirational lifestyle. Saks creates boards of food and travel ideas, while Rebecca Minkoff connects with women over various “firsts,” from first dates, to first

jobs and first apartments.

Saks dedicates about 70 percent of its pins to content or merchandise put out by the retailer, and the remaining 30 percent consists of pins from its community, giving customers time in the spotlight.



Pinterest board from Saks

The panelists agreed that social needs to be incorporated into operations, rather than working independently.

“We don’t really have the issues of silos, because to me, social by default supports the business organization, we don’t act as our own separate unit,” Saks’ Ms. Smith said. “Every campaign, everything we do has a social component.

“I think it’s looking at the business and saying, how does social drive revenue? It’s through ecommerce, it’s through a linking strategy,” she said. “So first social supports Saks.com, and then it supports the store.”

Saks’ social team monitors what is popular on a daily basis, and due to its corporate setup, it can call the buyers and get them to order more inventory if a particular SKU is hot. The buyers also work across channels, allowing them to adapt in-store and online based on trends seen on social.



Pinterest image from Saks

Even though it is important to grow an audience of followers, Ms. Berman argued that brands are using the wrong metrics. Instead of focusing on number of likes, brands should be looking at what images are driving conversions, and then optimize for that. This can be measured using Google analytics.

“Tune into that information, and then begin to sort of test out and learn, making sure that your best performing images are at a minimum not your best-kept secret,” Curalate’s Ms. Berman said.

Listening in

The panelists agreed on the importance of responding to consumers who post about a brand, by giving them a shout out socially, either through a like or repin. With this encouragement, they are more likely to post again and tag the brand.

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is heightening its sense of community through a new content hub that streamlines social media interactions with consumers.

Using New York Fashion Week as a backdrop, Saks' content page, housed on the retailer's Web site, launched on Sept. 4. The new aspect of Saks' Web site, dubbed as a "fanreel," will create a center for the retailer's fashion-forward consumers to gather and share via social media ([see story](#)).

"They're the best advocates you can have, so you want them to pin your content, but you should also pin their content, too," Saks' Ms. Smith said.

"Pinterest is a community that's not about relationships in the way that Twitter and Facebook are," she said. "It's about finding people with similar interests, and being inspired by those interests."

This back-and-forth and listening to consumers allows a brand to learn more about its consumers.

"Your board strategy is incredibly important, but more than 80 percent of the content on a platform like Pinterest has nothing to do with your boards," Ms. Berman said. "Even if the social media team sat back and ate bonbons all day long, there would be tons of content there.

"How are you finding and tracking that content and listening to what people are saying about your brand?" she said. "Because there's a tremendous opportunity to hear what they care about."

Final Take

Sarah Jones, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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