

INTERNET

Burberry, Gucci, Zegna are online fashion show masterminds

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By RACHEL LAMB

Prestige brands such as Burberry, Gucci, Hugo Boss, Armani and Ermenegildo Zegna are launching online fashion shows to drive sales, increase Web site traffic and engage consumers in a way like never before.

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Brands are using the Internet as a channel to stream fashion shows with the help of Web sites, Facebook and other social media. Some brands are taking another step and adding mobile to the mix.

“The live or streaming runway experience is very exciting, and there is an energy of competitiveness and oneupmanship that makes it very interesting to follow from a brand and marketing perspective,” said Michael J. Mirafior, associate director of integrated media at Zenith Media NY, New York.

“There have been runway shows on Facebook, HD shows, 3D shows, shows with gated or limited entry – to lend an air of exclusivity, or some might argue authenticity – virtual shows and shows that allow consumers to pre-order or purchase immediately,” he said.

“It is as if the industry woke up in 2010, and realized that it had to extend runway show access beyond the velvet rope to communicate brand ideals and acquire new

consumers.”

Why they work

Runway shows provide an exclusive behind-the-scenes glance into a luxury brand’s world. Before, only the elite and special consumers were able to see runway shows first hand.

By providing live, online streaming video coverage, consumers can feel as if they are part of the brand experience. Brands use this as leverage to reach their optimal target audience.

“Virtual tickets for ‘seats’ at the Gucci online runway shows are limited, and require that a user register for a Gucci Connect account to gain access,” Mr. Miraflor said.

“This accomplishes several things: The limited positioning of virtual seats preserves the essence of the runway show as a privileged affair, and the email registrations gained can be used to remind registrants of future events/runway shows and ecommerce/marketing purposes,” he said.

“The Gucci Connect experience therefore successfully parlays an exclusively-positioned online runway event into a direct marketing/CRM effort, encouraging sales.”

In addition, some brands find that these shows serve as sales opportunities, like Burberry who allowed users to purchase the items seen in the show directly after the video was over.

This break from the typical luxury cycle of having to wait months for the product to show up in stores catches consumers' attention, and since the brand was required to make these particular items available before the rest of the collection, it added another air of exclusivity for consumers.

“I'm not sure if this is the future of the online runway show, but it is definitely an evolution, and a nod to the power that the consumer – specifically the high fashion/luxury consumer – has online,” Mr. Miraflor said.

Possible channels

From Facebook to mobile to Web sites, there are tons of platforms in which brands choose to stream their videos of fashion shows.

Zegna and Hugo Boss opted to hold their fashion shows via Facebook, which allowed its users a chance to interact with the brand.

Zegna fashion show

Furthermore, both brands held competitions where consumers could take pictures of the fashion show and send them in to receive prizes.



Fashion show promo on Facebook

“Facebook is critically important to any brand, because of the reach – more than 500 million active users and more than 200 million active users who currently access Facebook through their mobile device,” said James Citron, CEO of Mogreet, Venice, CA.

“Peer endorsement and social shopping are big trends impacting luxury brands, so integrating ways for your peers to participate in a fashion show and share their thoughts on luxury items (such as apparel and accessories) are strong motivators to purchase,” he said.

Other brands such as Burberry, Armani and Gucci chose live-streaming options on separate Web sites.

Designing a separate site to host a fashion show can give users a way to interact with the brand because they can set up a chat box for live commentary from users throughout the show. Additionally, Gucci had a Web cam feature where users could see other consumers, giving the feeling of attending a real show.



Feed from Gucci's fashion show in January

Advertising a fashion show on other venues like Facebook and the brand's Web site can also drive traffic to these sites, especially if the access to a show is limited.

Some brands, for example Armani, require users to "Like" a Facebook page or sign up to the site before gaining access to the streaming feed.

These new fans will then receive messages and notifications from brands leading up to as well as after the show, which will encourage and incentivize them to purchase.

Another method is mobile, which provides just another platform for brands to stream their videos. Putting videos on YouTube – or even advertising through YouTube – is a great way for brands to ensure that users will see the fashion shows.

"The key to an online fashion show is to make it social and mobile, enabling the audience to share it with their friends, which can significantly impact the reach and success of an online show," Mogreet's Mr. Citron said. "Any brand that does an online fashion show would be remiss if it did not include a mobile component in the campaign.

"By adding mobile, the brand can build a database of its audience through mobile, send sneak-peeks of the fashion show to consumers, share behind-the-scenes footage and interviews with models, distribute exclusive music from the show, provide mobile coupons and share other exclusive content that the consumer can't get anywhere else," he said.

Burberry's fashion show is mobile-accessible from its Web site, so users do not have to search very long to find it.



Burberry's fashion show is available via mobile device

Additionally, users are already on the Burberry site after they watch the video, so it is a useful way to drive – and keep – foot traffic to a brand's site.

Best practices

Runway shows are exciting for a brand and its fans, but a brand has to have a concrete vision of what it expects out of it.

Industry experts describe some best practices of this type of marketing as personalization, making the site easy to find, navigate and to raise brand awareness.

Just because consumers know that there is a fashion show does not mean that they are going to watch it. Brands need to have engaging and unusual aspects that make consumers eager to see the next moves.

“Awareness is key, and the potential for online runway shows to extend the reach of a brand experience beyond its existing consumers and loyalists into an aspirational target – representing future sales and brand loyalists – requires concerted marketing efforts, be it through PR, paid media and social media channels,” Mr. Miraflor said.

“Brands simply cannot build an impressive online runway show and expect traditional fashion media outlets to drive impressive results,” he said. “Gucci recently ran a targeted Facebook engagement campaign to drive users to register at Gucci Connect to experience their Mens show in Milan.

“Not only did the campaign drive registrations for the Mens online stream, but it also resulted in an increase of Likes on the Gucci Facebook page, which resulted in further earned media value for Gucci, who is already optimizing the targeting learnings from that effort to prepare for its Gucci Connect Womens show in February.”

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Final take

Gucci's runway show from January

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