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Gift guides need to tell stories, spark emotion

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Tiffany & Co.'s holiday 2014 gift guide

By SARAH JONES

As the holidays draw nigh, brands are looking to stand out as gift-buying destinations, but what efforts can effectively attract consumers?

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From classic print catalogs to animated microsites and social media, brands have varied ways of reaching out to consumers. Experts agreed that the most important component to a gift guide is a personal, emotional appeal, which helps a campaign create a lasting impression.

"A gift, by definition, is highly personal and thoughtful," said Rebecca Robins, London-based director for Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America at [Interbrand](#) and co-author of "Meta-luxury: Brands and the Culture of Excellence."

"The experience of shopping for and ultimately purchasing a gift should reflect the same personalization and thoughtfulness," she said.

"We are living in the 'Age of You', one that's defined by personalization and predictive intelligence, where brands are becoming the consumer's partner. Brand experiences will be unique to the individual and highly customized based on personal information."

Making a connection

A number of brands have chosen to animate their gift guides, creating interactive ways for consumers to explore their products.

For example, jeweler Tiffany & Co. is incorporating its jewelry designs into a holiday landscape of “city lights and snowy nights” to inspire gifting.

The holiday-themed effort includes social postings, video content with shoppable adaptations and a standard gift guide. Each holiday season, Tiffany captures consumer sentiment by creating a world of glamour, romance and gifting using New York as its wintry backdrop ([see story](#)).



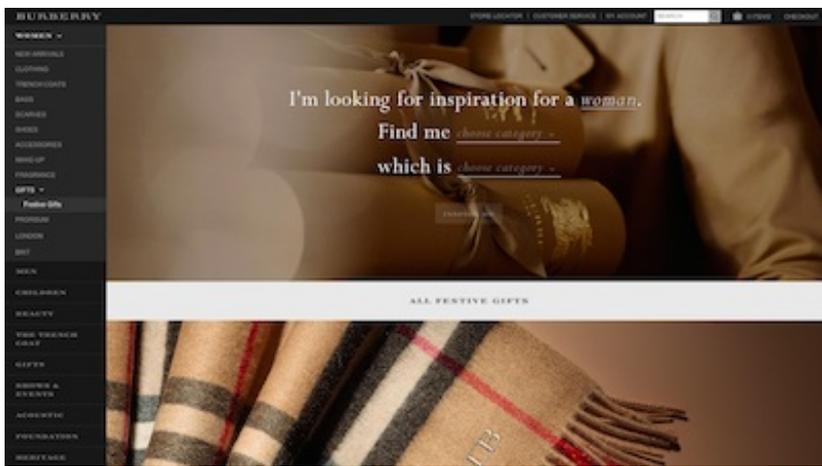
Video still from Tiffany campaign

"From a storytelling standpoint, showing large images and creating links to detailed product information or videos can help showcase the emotion and reasons why the product is the perfect gift," said Andrea Wilson, Fort Worth, TX-based vice president, strategy director and luxury practice lead at [iProspect](#).

Beyond speaking to consumers' holiday memories, Tiffany's gift guide included helpful touchpoints, allowing consumers to click to shop directly from the content, as well as share all of the content to their friends. Storytelling can help a brand be remembered, but it does not have as much impact on sales if there is no direct call-to-action or evident path to purchase.

Other functional considerations include searchability, allowing consumers to easily single out the perfect product for their loved one based on their characteristics.

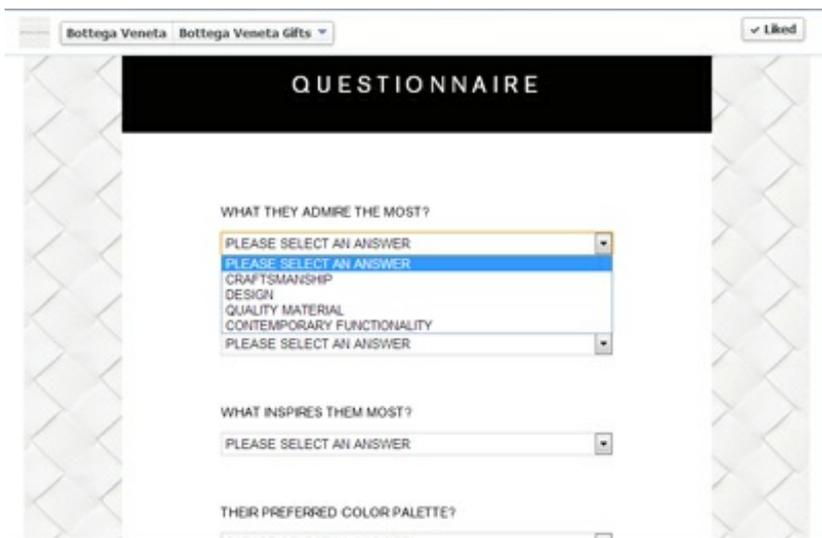
For instance, Burberry's gift finder asks consumers to select who they are shopping for—a man, woman or child—and then has them select what type of gift they would like to buy. For someone seeking inspiration for a woman, they can say they want a “little gift” or “the ultimate gift,” and then select from iconic, elegant or colorful to have a curated selection of items appear.



Screenshot of Burberry gift guide

Last year, Bottega Veneta used a similar tactic, asking its Facebook fans to answer a questionnaire to find the perfect gift to ask for or to give to a loved one.

Bottega Veneta's Facebook application created an individualized style profile based on consumers' preferences. In addition to creating an interactive experience, this app gave users the feeling of personalized treatment from the brand ([see story](#)).



Bottega Veneta Facebook app

Mulberry turned this type of feature into a slot machine game, as part of this year's #WinChristmas campaign ([see story](#)). Consumers can select who they are shopping for, how good they have been and then click to pull a lever and reveal three options.



Screenshot of Mulberry "spin and win" feature

This interactive feature is also tied to a contest.

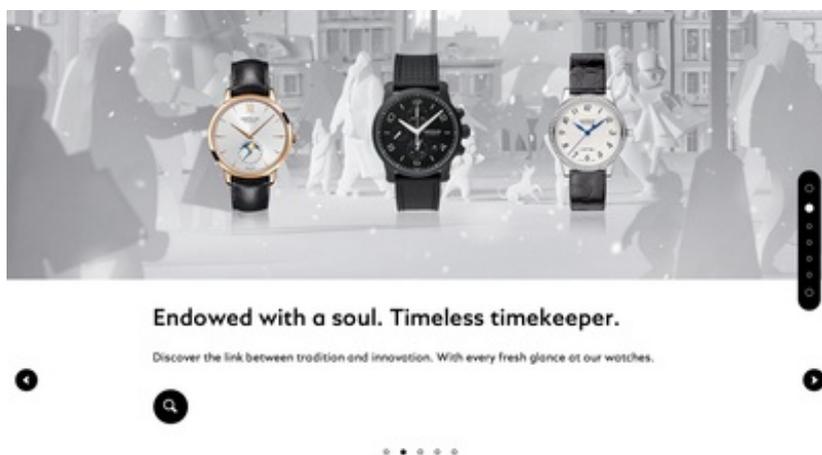
Like other marketing efforts, using known information about customers will help make messaging relevant to the viewer.

"As brands are increasingly enabled by intelligent infrastructure and powered by Big Data, they are developing integrated ecosystems of experiences that will ultimately reshape the world around us," Interbrand's Ms. Robins said. "The brands that orchestrate the magic and logic to fully bring this to bear will be the ones to watch.

It may seem obvious, but a large part of the consumer experience with a gift guide is being able to actually purchase items that appeal. iProspect's Ms. Wilson suggests making sure that there is enough inventory to support the marketing will help to prevent customer frustration.

Making sure that consumers are reached wherever they follow a brand, gift guide content can be distributed across all channels and platforms. Keeping awareness up and ensuring that content doesn't get stale, staggering releases can also make an impact.

Germany's Montblanc is doing just that, pushing its ideology of "Made by hand. Given from the heart" this holiday season with a winter wonderland-themed narrative unveiled week-by-week.



Montblanc gift guide

Montblanc's "A Parisian Winter Tale" is found on a microsite that features the chapters of the narrative penned by French novelist Tatiana de Rosnay and is accompanied by a gift guide. Collaborating with an author adds clout to Montblanc's effort and will likely help Winter Tale stand out among the numerous holiday efforts that rely on storytelling rich with seasonal nostalgia ([see story](#)).

"The distribution of the gift guide is equally important in ensuring storytelling, through sharing across all owned channels-- a brand's Website and social platforms, for example," Ms. Wilson said.

"Brands can feature different sections of the guide and feature at different times leading

up to the holidays, so the consumer sees different facets and the content is fresh and new," she said. "Stories behind the making of the guide, the selection or making of individual products can help gain interest."

Wrapping it up

Gift guides are just one piece of the puzzle for holiday marketing.

Classic advertising is also important, and can amplify a brand's campaign.

Luxury advertisers such as Christian Dior and Dom Pérignon aimed for visibility in November's W magazine by placing advertisements in the primary edition as well as its gift guide supplement. By placing ad campaigns in both the standalone issue and its gifting supplement, there is more of a likelihood that these products will be considered as readers plot their holiday purchases ([see story](#)).

Also, Burberry's gift guide fits into a larger campaign, which spans outdoor advertising, digital content and social media.

The brand is getting consumers in the holiday spirit with the launch of its first global festive campaign centered on young love.

Burberry's campaign centers on the four-minute film "From London with Love," a theatrical feature complete with 50 dancers that takes consumers on a "magical gifting journey." Throughout the campaign, Burberry infused elements of its heritage and Britishness, showcasing the iconic gifts associated with the brand ([see story](#)).

Even with social media and other holiday initiatives, a gift guide still has an important purpose, helping a consumer navigate the path to the ideal present.

"A gift guide is a concise point of view on a brand's inventory available for gifting, where brand ambassadors curate a list of their best seasonal offerings," Ms. Wilson said. "Just as appropriate as brand content sprinkled on owned properties and the Web, a gift guide is the same, though focused on a holiday time frame.

"Gift guides provide inspiration for gifting and edited product suggestions that can help a consumer to determine the perfect gift for their giftee."

Final Take

Sarah Jones, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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