

INTERNET

Saks shortens distance between New York and Toronto in international love story

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Image from Saks' "I Left My Heart in Toronto" campaign

By SARAH JONES

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is teasing the upcoming opening of its first Canadian locations by capturing a long-distance love affair that crosses borders.

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"I Left My Heart in Toronto" shows a romantic meet-up between bicoastal American blogger Alyssa Campanella and her Toronto-dwelling actor boyfriend Torrance Coombs in his hometown. As Saks prepares for the opening of two new stores in Toronto, showing Canada affection on its channels will likely resonate with its new potential consumers to the north.

"Stories are the language of our imagination, so if you want to capture the imagination of a new market you need to have a compelling story that will help you to do that," said Dave Rodgeron, a retail business development executive at [Microsoft Canada](#), Toronto.

"The story of Alyssa and Torrance is a nice way to accomplish that," he said. "Both people are real life characters which makes this story much easier to embrace."

"As someone who lives near Toronto I can also attest to the city's desire to be regarded along the same lines as New York and Los Angeles, as a world class city. Watching the video helps convey that image and I think the message will be well received."

Mr. Rodgerson is not affiliated with Saks, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Saks Fifth Avenue did not respond by press deadline.

Making an entrance

Saks, now owned by the Canadian retail group Hudson's Bay Company, is planning its entry into Toronto with store openings in Eaton Centre and Sherway Gardens slated for this spring. The 150,000 square-foot store in Eaton Centre will be housed within Hudson Bay's flagship downtown, while its Sherway Gardens location is within a mall.

Both stores are expected to help Saks reach a market previously untapped.

"I have a great deal of respect for the leadership at Hudson's Bay," Mr. Rodgerson said.

"Their ownership of Saks' has been in place for a while now, and the introduction of the Saks banner to the Canadian marketplace has been carefully choreographed.

"They were able to see first-hand how the mismanagement of Target's arrival in Canada played out and they have learned a great deal from that," he said. "One of the key things that they have determined is that the brand needs to invest itself in its new home and not come off as a satellite branch of the banner.

"By positioning themselves as retailers committed to the Canadian marketplace they will be successful doing that."

In preparation, the retailer has already created a Canadian-specific Web site and Instagram and Facebook accounts dedicated to each store. On the Web site, consumers can sign up for emails about the upcoming stores, but to shop they must redirect to Saks.com.

Representing the physical distance Saks is bridging with these openings, a social video shared to the store's blog, Saks POV, animates one of its ribbons unwrapping from its Fifth Avenue storefront and traveling the miles to Toronto, where it envelops a rendering of the new store.

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/-89g-6BCerY>

Saks Eaton Centre at Queen Street - Coming Spring 2016

Saks is using its social accounts to provide details about hiring and update consumers on the upcoming openings.

Generating excitement about the openings is conveyed metaphorically in the form of a real-life couple in an international relationship.

Miss America 2011 and editor behind blog "The A List," Ms. Campanella was living between New York and Los Angeles when she met her boyfriend Mr. Coombs, who has

been based in Toronto for the past three years while filming the CW television series “Reign.”

The two-minute film begins in New York, capturing Ms. Campanella as she stands on a rooftop overlooking the city. She exits Saks’ flagship store, bags in tow, and heads to her apartment.



Torrance Coombs and Alyssa Campanella for Saks

A vase of flowers sits on her counter, with a note from her boyfriend, which reads, “See you in Toronto.”

After video chatting on their phones, the blogger packs up her suitcase with luxe apparel and boards a plane.

Once she lands, the couple makes the most of their time together, cruising on a yacht, dining at Italian eatery Terroni and dancing in a sun-filled apartment overlooking the city.

At the end of her visit, the couple embraces before she rolls her bag away.

Embedded Video: https://www.youtube.com/embed/DImkUP_BF-s

I Left My ♥ in Toronto, Saks Canada Spring 2016

Untapped potential

The majority of Canada's population lives within 100 miles of the United States border, and with lower sales tax and more retailers, Canadians are increasingly crossing the border for shopping excursions.

The U.S. and Canada have similar language, social media, Internet and mobile penetration, creating an easy transition for brands familiar with the American marketplace to transfer efforts to Canadian consumers. The top 30 percent of Canada's household have more than \$100,000 in disposable annual income and with brands such as Christian Louboutin, Prada and Gucci topping the charts as consumer's favorite brands, Canada will likely see immense retail growth in upcoming years ([see story](#)).

For instance, department store chain Nordstrom opened its first international store in Calgary, Alberta in Canada in September 2014.

The 140,000 square-foot store in Chinook Centre houses a new beauty concept and full restaurant, as well as five shoe departments, carrying labels such as Jimmy Choo, Ferragamo and Valentino. This is the first of six Nordstrom stores to open in Canada over the next few years, an important step in expanding the retailer's global presence ([see story](#)).

Nordstrom, similarly to Saks, also has locations planned for both Eaton Centre and Sherway Gardens, opening in fall 2016 and spring 2017, respectively.

"Saks' downtown address will replace the former location of the Hudson's Bay store so this is a place where they will have a great deal of visibility," Mr. Rodgerson said.

"One of the things that Hudson's Bay is famous for during the Christmas season are its beautiful window displays," he said. "It will be interesting to see if these are used to help promote the arrival of the new banner.

"Sherway Gardens is the other location in Toronto where Saks' will be launched. While quite a way from downtown, it's one of the busiest and most exclusive retail locations in Canada. This too will afford them the visibility that will help to generate a great deal of anticipation in the months leading up to the opening."

Final Take

Sarah Jones, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/7ivqkJI8RQ>

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