

COMMERCE

Function supersedes form when building digital commerce sites

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Rich media impressions on mobile present opportunities for marketers

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

NEW YORK Through all of the technological innovations spurring the growth of ecommerce and mobile commerce, everything relates back to the consumer, according to panelists at Luxury Interactive 2015 on Oct. 13.

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Personalization, user-generated content and new channels such as Snapchat offer opportunities for brands to deliver better customer service, but the misuse of these tools could alienate the customer. When crafting a great ecommerce experience, diligence and experimentation are necessary, but each page must be properly designed to push the user toward a sale.

"There are very few home runs in ecommerce," said David Olsen, vice president, global beauty and grooming at [Net-a-Porter](#).

"Lots and lots of singles, fewer doubles, fewer triples," he said. "The most important thing is getting the basics right because once you have that you can build on it and be as successful as you need to be."

Mobile mayhem

Mobile commerce has grown tremendously in a very short period of time, accounting for as much as 40 percent of traffic for Net-A-Porter despite being much smaller just three years ago, where non-tablet mobile use was single-digit traffic. While increased traffic will naturally lead to a drop in conversion rate, the surge in mobile traffic means that mobile commerce sites must be optimized and user-friendly.

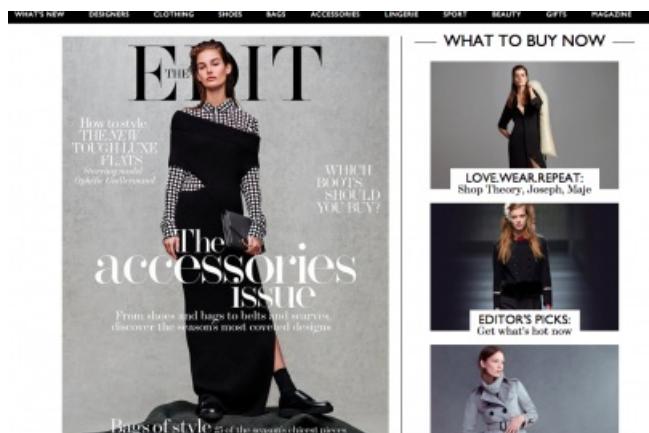


Left to right: Panelists David Olsen, Vikesh Dalal, Jonny Dixon and Amanda Willinger and moderator Melissa Feemster

To do this, it is important to ensure that form never overpowers function and to design pages with the primary goal of advancing the user to the next step in the transaction process.

"The clock starts ticking as soon as the user arrives on the landing page, so it's imperative to grab their attention right away," said Amanda Willinger, vice president of digital & ecommerce at **Lagos**.

"It's better to have your user be crystal clear on one message than be confused by too many messages," she said. "Great imagery [is important], yes, but [so is] a clear call to action on what's next to guide the user to a conversion."

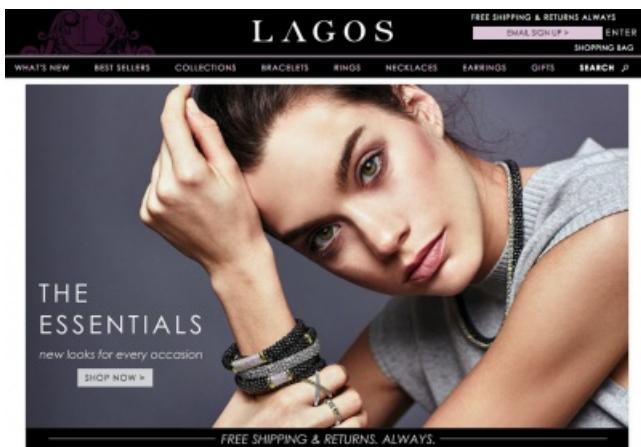


Net-a-Porter homepage

"Start with function first," agreed Vikesh Dalal, senior director of global digital marketing & ecommerce at **John Hardy**. "If the customer is coming to that page, we determine the sole function we want them to perform, then add form on top."

One enormous opportunity for digital sales is in personalization, a process that must be gradually but carefully integrated into every element of the site. Jumping the gun on personalization could turn someone off of a Web site permanently.

"We thought email was the first place where personalization is most relevant, rather than the site, which must be multiple things to multiple people," Mr. Dalal said. "The last thing I want is a call from my CEO about getting a weird homepage he didn't expect. If algorithms go wrong, it can lead to bad experiences."



Lagos ecommerce site

In the world of luxury especially, a bad experience is the difference between a longtime, VIP customer for one brand or for its competitor. Luxury defines itself and is defined by its consumer-base for great service, and that service must be properly translated to online platforms.

"Personalization is a big and multi-pronged word," Lagos' Ms. Willinger said. "New tech tricks can come and go, so whatever that new innovation is, we are very careful to make sure it enhances the core story of our brand, otherwise it's a distraction."

Net-a-Porter's Mr. Olsen agreed. "The customer is the most important thing to us. Is this thing going to enhance the customer experience overall? That's where your focus has to be as a retailer," he said. "Brand obviously is very important, but the customer is right there too."

Keeping up

Closely tied to digital commerce is the emergence of global markets, which will play a large part in shaping the future of luxury.

As the luxury landscape continues to evolve and geopolitical turmoil affects emerging markets, the brands that will come out on top must be able to adapt to the resulting consumer behavior.

On Sept. 29 in New York, part of a 15-city world tour of sorts, Albatross Global Solutions shared insights from its annual research study "The Journey of the Luxury Consumer" to better understand motivators, the purchase journey and the consumer landscape on a global scale. A key finding has been the definition of luxury itself as consumer interest has developed from a desire for exclusivity to wanting ensured craftsmanship from the high-end brands they interact with ([see story](#)).

Perhaps these higher standards of great, personalized service have led luxury marketers to fall behind in the market in bringing digital commerce sites up to the standard of in-store.

In today's retail environment, digital touchpoints serve as the "connective tissue" between Web sites, bricks-and-mortar storefronts, inventory and the consumer, according to a new report by L2.

The "L2 Intelligence Report: Omnichannel Retail 2015," developed in partnership with RichRelevance, provides insights into how digital alone does not offer marketers substantial ROI. But, an omnichannel approach, offering consumers a number of "fluid" touchpoints, leads to higher consumer spend.

Although most of luxury placed poorly on L2's data matrix for omnichannel fulfillment, brands such as Gucci, Christian Dior and Louis Vuitton included "push-to-store" features and for the first time prioritized ecommerce, albeit three to five years later than other retailers ([see story](#)).

The availability of luxury products on mobile phones to some extent threatens the aura of luxury, but it also allows such brands to differentiate themselves from one another through service.

"It's impossible to overstate how much digital technology has changed the world, including luxury," Lagos' Ms. Willinger said. "Everyone has it all in the palm of their hands and it creates desire and increases awareness, but the flip side is if everything is available anywhere nothing is special anymore."

"We all grapple with this. Brand strength continues to be the differentiator, and making sure we have the best product in our space and keeping the customer in the center of our activities and making good on our brand statement that

"we will always be there for them matters most."

Final Take

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