

MOBILE

Authenticity, engagement make for stronger social media presence

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@DKNYPRGirl persona

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

NEW YORK Any brand can create a social media account, but using these platforms to create a natural extension of the label and leverage social clout to generate sales and loyalty is another matter, according to a speaker at Luxury Interactive 2015 on Oct. 13.

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Social media has shrunk the distance between brands and consumers, but bringing these parties closer together has also destroyed traditional business/customer relationships. To be successful on social media, consumers need to be treated like equals and people, otherwise social presence could, counterproductively, push consumers to competition.

"A lot of brands think We have to do this, we have to create content, we have to get out there," said Aliza Licht, also known as "DKNY PR Girl," former public relations executive for **DKNY**. "A lot of times the need or the urgency to create content is overshadowing the importance of staying true to your brand's DNA."

Social engagement

Establishing your brand's DNA is crucial to creating an authentic and admired social media presence. Brands must identify their core values and ideas and set up boundaries on what topics they will and will not get involved in online.

Tweeting and posting only about promotions and new products creates an inhuman distance from the consumer's standpoint, but getting involved in serious sociopolitical discussions could alienate those with differing viewpoints.



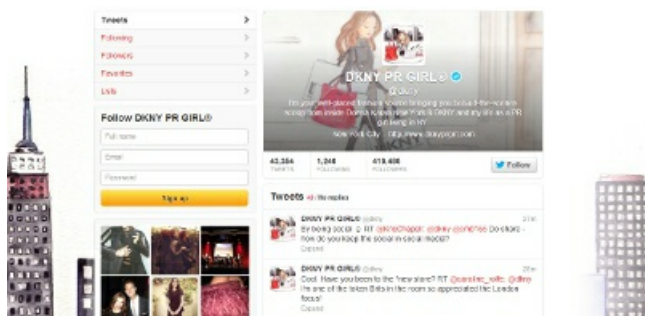
DKNYPR Girl often tweeted about social happenings to build authenticity

Any active user on social media will inevitably find themselves in some sort of a crisis, but that only makes it more important to engage with consumers as equals. When communication is this direct, the traditional positioning of the brand being above the consumer no longer works, and it won't create a network of loyal consumers and defenders when that crisis comes along.

"When you're friends with a customer you create respect and create a situation where, when you make a mistake and

we all do you are more easily forgiven," Ms. Licht said.

In addition, when trying to reach international consumers, the same tricks that work in one country might not work elsewhere, so international partners are crucial in helping brands find effective ways to engage. That said, there are common denominators. People all around the world want to be heard.



DKNYPR Girl twitter

In one case, Ms. Licht tweeted about the 100 percent humidity in New York on a summer day. "Of course it's a hair-wash day," she added. By doing so, she found a natural and enticing way for followers all over the world to share their thoughts with the weather, and retweeting replies from different countries showed that DKNY listened to global consumers.

Search functions also make it easy to "listen" on social media. Users talking negatively about a brand may not be tagging that brand in their posts, but they can easily be searched, and the findings can be used to make changes that will satisfy doubters before competitors steal them away.

As it is in everything else, self-reflection and self-criticism is crucial to creating a strong social presence. A brand should examine its output to ensure it is putting forth the best version possible of itself in terms of message and attitude.

Youth movement

With millennials growing into affluence and becoming a key market, social media presence will only grow in importance.

Social media has created a unique environment that allows for personal engagement between consumers and brands, according to the creative director of Loewe at the Cond Nast International Luxury Conference April 23.

Social media allows consumers to be involved with brands on an instant basis. The stories that can be told and the people that can be reached through modern mediums change the face of the luxury industry ([see story](#)).

The genuine and personal connection that social media lends itself to is more attractive to consumers who want more from businesses than constantly being sold to.

Consumers are split on their willingness to download luxury brand applications, but when dispersed into generations, 72 percent of millennials are inclined to download a branded app, according to a report from The Luxury Institute.

Digitization of the luxury world is slowly evolving as younger generations grow into being affluent consumers. Luxury clients differ across more than just generations, but understanding the prime and upcoming consumer can prepare marketing teams for the future ([see story](#)).

"A lot of brands still maintain that position of We're up here, you're down here, we'll push content to you when we feel like you need to know something, we're not going to respond to you, but we'll let you know what is important," Ms. Licht said. "I don't agree with that approach. I think being likable and being an engaging platform makes a huge difference in growing a community.

"The anti-elitist mentality is a winning mentality," she said.

Final Take

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