

MULTICHANNEL

Responsive Web design means making it easy for consumers

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Image courtesy of Michael Kors

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

NEW YORK As mobile and multichannel buying experiences become more prevalent, responsive Web design is the key to maximizing efficiency, according to a panel at Luxury Interactive 2015 on Oct. 14.

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Buyers have been moving amongst desktop, mobile phones and tablets through the duration of research and purchase for years now and the trend is only growing, so ecommerce sites must be optimized for functionality across all these platforms. This means that brands must prioritize building a functional Web site on mobile, tablet, and desktop over everything else, even branding, and execute their ideas.

"At first, we thought What does our creative director want this to look like and what does this mean for the brand?" said Jennifer Scruggs, ecommerce executive at [John Varvatos](#). "But the biggest takeaway internally is forcing every one of our teams to think about what the customer wants and not what we want.

"We don't always know what the customer wants," she said. "Analytics are a great thing, and we should embrace them. They don't lie."

Function over form

Without responsive web design, objects like wide photos could cause annoyances for users, such as requiring them to scroll left and right, or text might be too small to see without zooming, which could in turn necessitate more scrolling. Function-rich pages in particular, such as those involved in checkout, would be hard to navigate without responsive, size-appropriate interface and might lead consumers about to make a purchase to bail at the last minute.

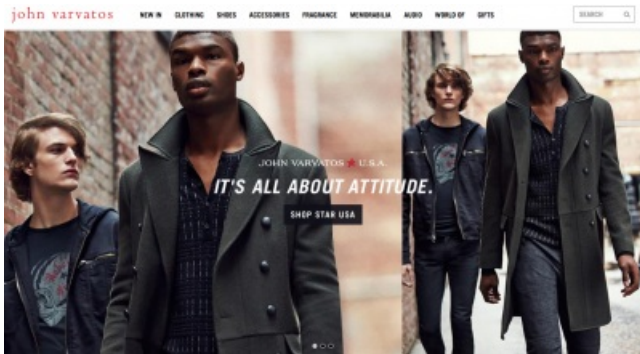


Panelists left to right: John Kuehl, Sub-Zero Group; Lauren Croke, Eileen Fisher; Jennifer Scruggs, John Varvatos; Elkin Nance, Oscar de la Renta; Jason Wallis, Mozu

For scaling down a page to work, the site must have a strong foundation that will not lead to zooming or scrolling problems if blown up or shrunk and that drives the consumer toward the next step in the transaction.

"Regardless of the device, it's about What's the most important thing on this page?" said John Kuehl, digital marketing manager at **Sub-Zero Group, Inc.** "Ask, What's most important about this, what's most important about that?" If you don't do that, your customer is going to be lost."

Although creating a responsive design sometimes initially leads to potentially alarming shifts, a slight drop in a metric is likely less detrimental when put into context than it initially appears.



John Varvatos ecommerce site

"When we launched with tablet, page time went up and conversion went up," Ms. Scruggs said. "When we launched mobile, our conversion went down, which is really interesting because our previous mobile experience was awful.

"After digging in, we realize that the previous experience was so bad that the people bounced and never came back, so [conversions] were people who really wanted to buy something. This time our average order value went up, traffic went up, page views went up, but conversion went down because so many more were coming to the site."

The percentage of users who had their eyes set on a specific product was no longer as high due to increased traffic, but those who did not convert were more likely to return because the site itself was mobile-optimized, leading to more conversions and more customers in the long term.



Oscar de la Renta ecommerce site

"Our experience echoed a lot of that," agreed Elkin Nance, vice president of ecommerce at [Oscar de la Renta](#). "Our mobile site was so awful; it made you want to bounce after two seconds. [After launching responsive] we saw a huge increase in order value and in traffic, it was double to triple the traffic, huge revenue increases right off the bat. "We've seen a huge shift in our traffic moving away from our desktop onto mobile and tablet, and specifically onto mobile."

In the process of building the Web site, responsive Web design requires employers to broaden their skillsets.

"Previously, everyone tended to operate in a silo, which can be very easy when you're not forced to think about the same product in different ways," Ms. Scruggs said. "When we started the discussion of launching with responsive, it forced everyone to sit around the same table. It forced IT to turn on their creative mind to think about images and assets and it forced our creative team to think about technology."

Perhaps most importantly, missing features will never bother a customer as much as poorly implemented features, and decorative flourishes may be the most difficult to translate to another device. Having an editorial section may be useful, but the mobile shopper would not bounce if the site lacked it; they could, however, look to a competitor to fill their needs if a buggy page won't load properly.

Responding with responsive

The importance of function over form is a recurring theme throughout this year's Luxury Interactive conference.

According to a previous panel on Oct. 13, through all of the technological innovations spurring the growth of ecommerce and mobile commerce, everything relates back to the consumer.

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 ([see story](#)).

Responsive Web design will lead to even more online sales, a potentially frightening prospect for in-store.

Online fashion retail is poised for rapid growth, but that does not mean that in-store retail will falter or become less important, according to a new report by Fashionbi.

Although less than 5 percent of luxury goods are sold online, that number is expected to skyrocket to 20 percent by 2020, thanks in part to dependably large growth in the Asia-Pacific region. As this rapid growth takes place, brands must enable omnichannel interactions that provide consumers with one, smooth, inter-linked brand experience rather than thinking of them as separate digital, mobile and in-store platforms ([see story](#)).

"It continues to be an ongoing battle to get everyone to think from both sides," John Varvatos' Ms. Scruggs said. "The Internet doesn't just happen."

Final Take

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