

COLUMNS

SuperYachters' social media platform is perfect example of what not to do in social

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When I teach luxury marketing I often find that giving practical examples helps students understand the principles better than just statistics and theory. This is one of those lessons.

Focused on the ultra-high-net-worth market, I work with some of the most elite luxury brands globally. I was curious about the SuperYachters social media platform that I kept being sent ads inviting me to sign up. I asked around and only one person I knew had tried it. From the name "SuperYachter" it clearly is trying to position itself in the luxury sector. I thought I should learn about it.

Smooth sailing?

Obviously, real owners of multimillion-dollar yachts are not going to be looking for new friends. In social media situations they are often the ones that all the luxury sales people feed on, and every interaction for them is someone soliciting them to buy a car, a property, a piece of art, sell them on a new a new business idea, or get them to donate to a favorite charity.

Social media to this group is not fun. They tend to like to stay among their peers, not out of snobbery, but for the ability to interact with people that do not need something from them.

Social media sites such as SuperYachters tries to capture the larger group of less affluent, aspirational, luxury lovers. By using a high-price-point activity such as yachting in their name/packaging, it stimulates those aspirational luxury desires. It creates a mental image that they can insert themselves, with the wind in their hair, Champagne in hand, on sun-kissed crystal waters.

Douglas McFarlane, CEO of United Kingdom-based Lomond Yachts, founded SuperYachters.com. The service is supposed to be a combination of LinkedIn, Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter rolled in together, and provide profiles of members who subscribe.

Even though Mr. McFarlane does not enjoy the polished reputation of most of his luxury professional peers, he does works in the elite luxury sector, and often innovation in a products or services is born from this sector. I was excited to see.

The opportunity presented itself when I was away for a long weekend visiting an elderly family member, which left me in the unusual situation of having extra time on my hands.

So I thought I would sign up and report back to others about it, so they could decide. It was not an exceptionally bad process and I had not planned on giving it a bad review. I had not even completed the membership form when I got kicked out.

I tweeted "I signed up today on @superyachters.com. Many of U R curious so I will give updates on my experience 2 better help U decide." There was clearly an interest as a bunch of social media professionals started following.

As I was getting answers to questions we all had, I posted them: "FYI on @superyachters it does not include the "followers" on FB nor show LI over 500 (I have @ 10M). This really makes the reach inaccurate." This is a problem that other platforms also have, but one that you must recognize as you interpret your stats. There was no new innovation here.

As I was signing up on SuperYachters' social media platform, every time I hit the enter key to input information, an ad popped up to buy its Pro membership. At the bottom of its ad it says, "Do you want to stop getting these ads?" And if you click yes, it basically says, then pay us and well stop.

This practice reminded me of a creative homeless man in New York who rode the subways with a trumpet. Although completely void of any musical talent, he would blow a loud annoying sound until he had raised enough money from that subway car, and then would move to the next car where he would annoy them with an ear piercing shriek until they cough up enough funds.

It is an interesting tact to take, creative if void of talent, but one not well suited to the luxury sector. Here is my exact Tweet: "@superyachters is constantly hitting U up to buy their PRO package. I haven't even sent 1 post and been asked a dozen times to upgrade."

I simply posted a few facts, such as "they only manage 3 social media sites Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, not G+ or Elixio which is affiliated with LI." This is a fact that anyone signing up would learn. I am not sure why that was objectionable.

As to the ad that keep popping up to buy its Pro version, even though I had not finished signing up, this is an easily fixed problem that it should be grateful to know. I get paid by luxury brands to do this type of thing for them. I posted only facts, no opinions.

I got a notice that I was having my membership which I had not even completed revoked. It did not end there.

Broken thread

SuperYachters censored everyone on the Twitter thread by unfollowing them and then blocking them. Not only were these people blocked from @superyachters, but also from @LomondYachts and @DouglasMcFarlane's personal account.

In addition to blocking everyone on the thread, the next day all of Mr. McFarlane's tweets were deleted in a vain attempt to erase the history of this poor behavior. One thread follower blocked was a paid Pro subscriber of SuperYachters. This is how it treats its top clients?

Another individual on the thread was a yacht industry professional from Lomond Yachts Mr. McFarlane's company who was shocked at the unprofessionalism, and was expecting Mr. McFarlane to be thankful for the free insight from an international luxury marketing expert.

This had been a wonderful opportunity to show that he specifically or the company heard the customer and was responsive.

SuperYachters lost a valuable opportunity to build community and improve its service. Instead, it started defensively blocking people. Had SuperYachters not reacted like that, it would probably have gotten a decent review which could have increased its sales.

I get interested in a product or service because of the good things it provides, but I make my buying decision based on knowing the bad things, or shortcomings. I then make an educated decision that I can accept the bad to obtain the good or not. This process manages customer's expectations and is important in the marketing and sales process.

I am very surprised that Mr. McFarlane behaved that way. I really assumed he had a twenty-something IT geek, not trained in luxury service, who was managing this side business, and he would have straightened the issue out with that employee when he got into work and would have someone reach out to me in the good customer service style

expected in the luxury sector.

The fact that he chose the business strategy of placing his head in the sand by blocking people is not the strategic planning taught at MBA programs. It is always better to know what is going on, and what customers and potential new customers are saying about your product or service. I find it strange that an adult would act in such a childlike way. I find it even stranger that a person working with luxury clients would act this way.

The fact that SuperYachters is censoring content on social media strikes me as more than a little ironic. I was shocked by the reaction to me, and could not even fathom it taking aim at others involved only by being on a thread on social media.

Net net

Time and trust are the two most important factors in reaching the wealthy.

The uber rich have the unique opportunity to experience everything at the best level not pick and choose what they can afford and saving time has even a larger incentive. There are two aspects of time: quality and quantity.

It takes more than just pretty pictures to reach the wealthiest demographic. It takes bringing them information that is relative to them by someone that they trust.

Most customer service by luxury brands is to save the customer time, or improve the quality of the time spent in conjunction to the product or service. The higher up on the wealth scale, the more time is worth.

The UHNW are willing to exchange their excessive amount of dollars to save time. The farther down the financial scale, the less value time has, and that is why aspirational consumers are willing to spend time calculating credit card points, travel on off-days to get discounts, fight crowds to shop sales, and other less pleasant, more time-consuming activities to save dollars.

SuperYachters provides an inferior service because it is a waste of time to sign up. But even more important is the trust: when you join you sign over the right to SuperYachters to create posts on your behalf that may not be relevant to or appropriate for your followers, but instead promotes their Pro (paying) members.

SuperYachters' customer service consists of blocking you, censoring your content and punishing others who agree with you.

The bottom line is that you are placing your brand in the hands of a company that acts like a tempestuous teenager. Does this behavior inspire the trust needed to have SuperYachters represent your name or brand?

THE LESSON here to a company using social media is to do the exact opposite. Address issues head on, let your customers know that you hear them, that you want to help, and are willing to improve. This builds a relationship which helps bond consumers to the brand.

Arrogant, defensive and bullying behavior is born from weakness and insecurity. A situation that could have been very advantageous for the brand became destructive out of its lack of knowledge on how to manage its social media.

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