

MULTICHANNEL

Retailers can be powerful players in neighborhood development, says Future Laboratory exec

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Net-A-Porter's The NetSet

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK Net-A-Porter's social commerce application The Net Set is representative of the direction that media is heading towards, according to executives from The Future Laboratory at the U.S. Retail & Luxury Futures Forum on Oct. 21.

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A number of pioneers, including Net-A-Porter, are finding disruptive ways to build communities around their brand and make the shopping process more transparent through technology. These early adopters of new store formats, ecommerce and curation show what is possible from an engagement perspective, but brands need to be willing to adapt.

"What we wanted to do is share case study examples of brands that we think are doing an interesting thing when it comes to this idea of facing the challenges that are here and that are with us now," said Chris Sanderson, co-founder of [The Future Laboratory](#).

"And this idea, the word you could use is provenance, but the other word you could also use is transparency, and that sense of thinking about this idea of the consumer who does actually want to see the real person who is making that product," he said. "Whether it's just a picture on the screen or the opportunity to meet them, or the way that they can find the story, there are all sorts of ways in which technology is allowing us to do this in a way that is real, that it isn't about the hokey, fake version of either the stitchy stichy handcraft person from Italy or from India or from Brooklyn, but it's the real deal."

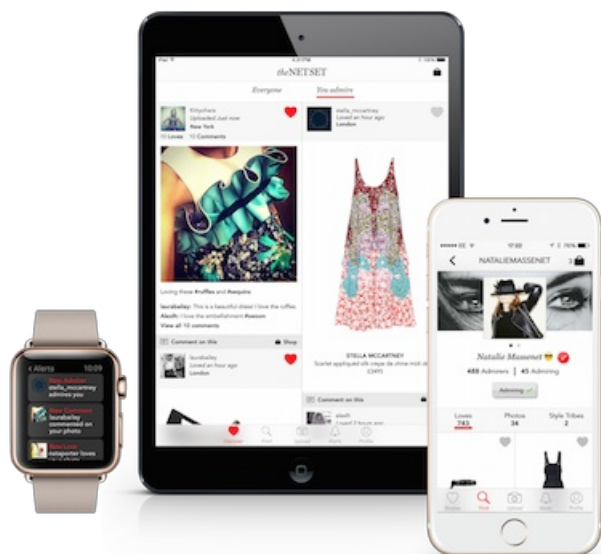
Luxury disrupted

The Net Set launched earlier this year as an invitation-only mobile platform reserved for early adopters and VIPs. Those who were able to secure entry could then invite five friends, creating word of mouth that went beyond Net-A-Porter's 4.1 million followers.

Within the app, consumers can browse merchandise through a curated social filter or discover items using visual recognition, such as locating garments or accessories within a certain hue ([see story](#)).

While Net-A-Porter is a digital company, it does not directly focus on showing consumers its tech abilities. Instead, it

brings a human touch to the ecommerce environment.



The Net Set

Also looking to build an experience around shopping is the Nike+45 Grand concept environment, a members-only club that delivers hospitality in a branded fashion. Reflecting the shift in female mindset, the brand speaks to empowerment and strength over skinny, allowing women to better achieve their fitness goals through a concierge that will pair them with a personal trainer.

This club's exclusivity is seen as a positive, allowing Nike to speak to a select few women and celebrate consumers. Rather than trying to drive sales, this takes a longer road to purchase, focusing on relationship building for the long-term.



Nike+45 Grand lounge area

Everlane's Transparent City series hosted five events throughout a seven-day period across Los Angeles. Chefs, artists and bloggers who share a similar ideology to the brand interacted with consumers in salons, through which Everlane took a slightly political stance.

This initiative reflects a need for brands to be open enough with consumers that they can allow for examination and also demonstrates that ideals are best communicated physically rather than verbally.

The way in which consumers are shopping online is very different from how they are shopping in-store. Compared to the open-ended discovery in bricks-and-mortar environments, online tends to be more purpose driven, as consumers arrive at an ecommerce site with an idea of what they want to buy.

Semaine brings in personalities to host a mini-boutique of items that reflect their individual vision. Incorporating content and a hint of humor to the shopping experience, the online magazine and platform creates short videos with each curator, showing their lifestyle and the surrounding product array.

Alexander Gilkes, How To Buy Art

In this case, the tastemakers actually become a crucial piece of the puzzle. According to the presenters, Semaine maintains a consistent brand voice that delivers product without seeming like it is overtly selling. The content also encourages consumers to take their time while shopping, and the rotation of curators inspires repeated visits for new finds.

Making a connection

What all of these initiatives have in common is building a personal connection with consumers, something that will likely pay off.

According to a recent report by The Future Laboratory, in-store interactions remain a driving force in luxury goods purchasing with 46 percent of consumers preferring the one-on-one attention provided in a store setting.

The Future Laboratory's "Luxury Index" examines how affluent consumers hear about and purchase luxury goods and services, with insights offering an understanding of attitudes, emotions and the mindset of the "Luxurian" demographic. By being aware of motivators, luxury brands will be able to better leverage insights to meet the demands and expectations of affluent consumers in-store and in the digital space ([see story](#)).

Fifteen years from now, the luxury industry's current retail models will no longer work as consumer expectations will have radically evolved.

During "The Future of Luxury: Global Research Insights, Emerging Trends and New Business Models for 2030" presentation June 3, conducted by graduate students of the Fashion Institute of Technology class of 2015, the peer groups suggested that lasting memories, "centers of creation" flagship stores and like-minded cities will drive luxury sales in the future. The three presentations built on the larger themes of new luxury consumer values, platforms and epicenters to paint a picture of what the world may look like if consumer behavior continues on its current track ([see story](#)).

"What lies at the heart of this for us is this notion of disruption," Mr. Sanderson said. "We are in a market of disruption, because it's the Uber market, it's the sharing economy market, it's the platforms that we accepted, that underpinned the way we do stuff in the industry is up for grabs.

"And if as businesses we don't appreciate that actually our logistics change, our chains have to change, our models have to change, our integration has to change, our manufacturing has to change, then we are not a business fit for purpose in the 21st century."

Final Take

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