

INTERNET

## How can brands replicate the corner shop online?

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*Instagram post from Manolo Blahnik*

By SARAH JONES

LONDON As retail shifts away from the local bricks-and-mortar shop to ecommerce, brands will need to develop new ways to learn about their consumers, according to an executive from Styloko at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015 on Oct. 26.

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In the analog world, there was a natural process of learning about customers as they returned to a store, gradually leading to a true understanding of who the client was. With consumers more skeptical and the corner shop disappearing, brands need to find new ways to provide a personal touch.

"I think that oftentimes in the businesses that we're in, we think about personalization in a very clinical way," said Shannon Edwards, CEO of **Styloko**. "We think about it in terms of the tools and technology, and we actually forget what it means to personalize, and pre-Internet age what it meant for business as well."

### Two-way conversation

Ms. Edwards asked the tables to role-play in pairs, taking on the parts of shopkeeper and customer. She then asked attendees to share what they found.

Some felt as though they had been interrogated as the store owner looked to gain information in a short time frame. In traditional retail, a gradual conversation over multiple visits felt less prying.

One way to get today's skeptical consumer to open up is to offer personal details to establish a rapport or shared values.

As one attendee pointed out, consumers can have a more worthwhile experience if they communicate with a store associate, making this human connection important.



*L'Avenue Paris*

Brands try to personalize the online purchase experience, but consumers often do not notice this effort until the customization goes wrong. For instance, an outlier purchase bought as a gift can alter a client's profile and begin delivering non-relevant product suggestions.

Since personalization online can come off as creepy, brands could also develop various levels of customization per a user's preference.

Styloko looks to bridge the human and inhuman in its fashion aggregator.



*Shannon Edwards*

Using behavioral data, along with image processing, natural language processing and user behavior analysis, the tech company delivers merchandise related to what consumers have clicked previously. For instance, if she comes to the site and is clicking on luxury shoes, Styloko will serve her other upscale footwear rather than fast fashion.

Consumers can also search by both text and image, for instance finding items from Net-A-Porter or discovering all dresses with a similar detail. Through the image search function, the platform evens out the playing field between established and emerging labels.

However, while this is personalized, it is done in a way that is designed to seem unobtrusive, using general consumer behavior to drive the experience and surprise and delight. This also allows for a differentiated approach for diverse generations, playing to the varied comfort with data collection.



### *Styloko's The WantList*

Styloko has developed a mobile application The WantList, which uses a Tinder-style swiping mechanism, which has been swiped 3 million times since it launched in June. Ms. Edwards advised that brands think about the strengths of each device when designing platforms, rather than simply shrinking down the full Web site to form the mobile experience.

#### Data plan

With all of the consumer data available to brands, the opportunities for personalization have grown, but marketers need to be careful that they are not stepping over a line, according to a panel at iProspect's Client Summit in 2014.

Consumers have come to expect a certain level of customization both on and offline. For luxury brands specifically, using data to personalize requires subtlety, since consumers can become offended if a boundary of privacy is crossed ([see story](#)).

Today's luxury marketers need to use both their left and right brains, developing strategies that are simultaneously creative and informed by data, according panelists at Luxury Interactive 2015 on Oct. 15.

Creative efforts provide a testing ground that can yield actionable data, while data can simultaneously be used as a starting point for creative strategy to offer up campaigns that resonate with consumers. Luxury brands frequently collect data to better personalize the service they provide to consumers, but this comes with a responsibility to do something meaningful with clients' information ([see story](#)).

"Real-time personalization is a lot of words, but just generally speaking is more sort of in the moment allowing you to feel like you're having a personal experience based on your behavior," Ms. Edwards said.

"So it's not necessarily the creepy name thing, or not necessarily taking a lot of effort from a brand to have a physical person communicating with you on social media," she said. "It's only one aspect of it, but it's about harboring what you're doing online and using that to delight you."

#### Final Take

*Sarah Jones, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York*