

MULTICHANNEL

## Belstaff's data gathering efforts show virtues of patience

October 28, 2015



*Belstaff Kilton Skirt*

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

LONDON British apparel and accessories label Belstaff has seen great results in its journey to track its clientele, according to a brand executive during Luxury Interactive Europe 2015 on Oct. 27.

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When Belstaff was acquired by JAB in 2012, the brand was given a clean slate, which it took advantage of to collect data on its clientele for targeted outreach. Integrating sales channels and knowing the consumer are by now essential components for a brand's continued success.

"We had a retail channel, we had a newly launched ecommerce channel and we had wholesale," said Alison Conway, vice president, client and omnichannel at **Belstaff**.

"All of them worked fine, they all worked well, but they had connection with each other," she said. "They didn't interact, we had no way to really understand and identify who our customers were, which was not great."

What's your name?

With the acquisition by JAB, which also owns Jimmy Choo and Bally, Belstaff made a decision to transition from a brand with roots and heritage to what Ms. Conway called a "true luxury brand." Doing so meant focusing on the consumer rather than the brand.



*Belstaff Macau*

Over the next two years, the brand made efforts to better understand who its customers were, demographically,

geographically and psychographically, primarily through an exit survey.

Up to that point, a loyal customer who split her time among three countries could be known to the staff in the Milan store and in the Newark, NJ store and in the London store, but there was no way for those stores to communicate that they were all servicing the same customer.

However, great service and multichannel retailing are not easy to initiate, and the brand hit some road bumps as the survey showed that personnel did not understand consumers and thus could not build and maintain relationships.

Staff was still referring to their "little black books" rather than the company-wide system to record and track consumers, an approach that could work for an individual salesperson but was less effective at tracking clientele. Similarly, data was initially inconsistent and disparate, with information being entered in the wrong fields or the same consumer having inconsistent addresses across different surveys.

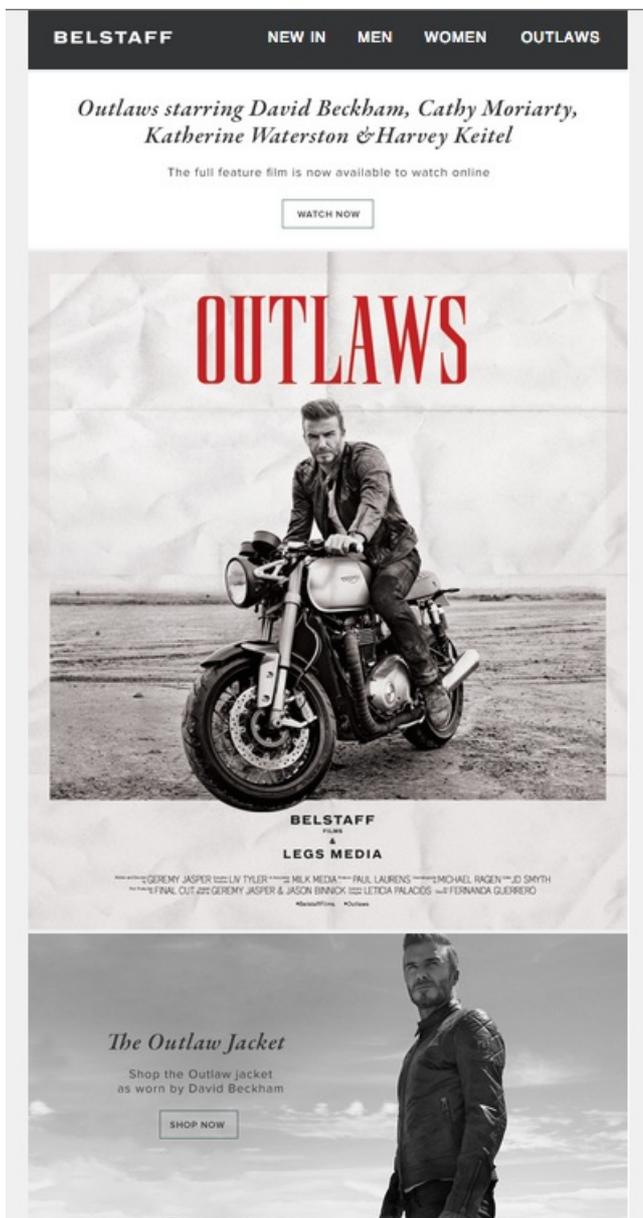


*Alison Conway speaking at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015*

"It was like trying to make sense of a bunch of spaghetti strands," Ms. Conway said. "So what we did was say, Okay, if we have a bunch of inconsistent data, if we have a bunch of issues with how we are collecting data, we potentially have a couple different problems here."

"One might be that we don't have proper training, one might be that we don't have the right systems in place [and] one might be that we haven't communicated properly or incentivized our sales team to collect data," she said.

Such an obstacle is frustrating, but it would be a mistake to think that it is more trouble than it is worth. Belstaff had to go back to the basics once again and sort through and toss out data over the next six months, but what remained afterward was clean and serves as the foundation for current sales practice.



### *Belstaff Outlaws email*

Thanks to the data, the brand now geotargets consumers, promoting a specific store based on where she is located.

Similarly, it invited frequent women's wear buyers into the store to mingle, meet the designer and to give the staff a chance to put faces to names. For those who wanted to practice working with a consumer based on her personal interests, Belstaff emailed loyal clients offering them a personal shopping appointment.

Just as special events bring in consumers and make them feel wanted and let staff learn to recognize VIP clientele, recommendations are now personalized. The manager of the Milan store sends out an email every Thursday offering hand-picked recommendations to each individual.



### *Belstaff London collection*

Although the brand is still working to improve its offerings, it is already seeing results. Retention is up 14 percent, targeted clients are spending 20 percent more, returns more often and purchase more items.

A year-long journey to fully integrate data across retail and ecommerce platforms, to gather data and to acquaint staff with consumers by name may seem like a lot of effort, but it would be a mistake for a brand to think it's too much trouble.

Not only do the results speak for themselves, but just as important as the bottom line is status and nothing says "luxury" like special events and being called by name when you walk through the door.

An ongoing journey

Although Ms. Conway suggests Belstaff got in the game a little late, some data implies the brand is ahead of the curve.

According to a recent study by Yes Lifecycle Marketing, many retailers are still unwilling or unequipped to tailor customer service to the individual.

The study looks at retailers in a variety of different sectors and finds that many have not sufficiently tracked clientele and are thus unable to provide sales associates with the personalized data that will help initiate and close a transaction. With consumers navigating freely between mobile, Web and in-store shopping and brands therefore able to gather more information than ever before about frequent shoppers, properly cataloguing clientele has emerged as a way to provide the best possible customer service and showcase a great branded experience ([see story](#)).

Personalized service is a hallmark of luxury, but while it is expected now more than ever, technology offers ways to keep up with demands.

While technology can help to deliver a high-touch experience to consumers, data and automation cannot replicate the level of engagement that a salesperson can create with shoppers, according to an executive from Moda Operandi at Luxury Interactive 2015 in New York on Oct. 13.

Moda Operandi employs stylists, who work with its most valued consumers to provide personalized recommendations and one-to-one communications, but the process being used to deliver this service was tedious. Keeping the same human touch business model, Moda Operandi built a new platform to help its stylists deliver more relevant, visually appealing messages to the most important customers ([see story](#)).

Perhaps because technology has made the consumer both accessible and polymorphic, the quest for excellent service never ends.

"We've come a long way but there's still so far to go," Ms. Conway said. "We are finally taking a look at how we run the business fundamentally and we are stopping doing things just because it makes sense for us, for our considerations, and we are starting to look at what this means for our clients instead.

"Okay, what does this mean?" she said. "It means you know your clients and, guess what, you can do so much more with them."

Final Take

*Forrest Cardamenis, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York*