

INTERNET

## Use homepage design to serve dual purpose of storytelling, shopping

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Image from Net-A-Porter's The Edit

By SARAH JONES

LONDON An ecommerce site's homepage acts as a window into the online store, making appearance and merchandising just as imperative, according to panelists at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015 on Oct. 27.

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Deciding where to place content and which products to feature in what part of the page is a constantly evolving science best based on consumer behavior data. Most importantly, the homepage should be a reflection of a brand's character first and foremost, providing both a familiar face to existing customers and an introduction to first-time visitors.

"We're in the process of updating a lot of our brand visuals," said Jenny Pashkova, global marketing manager at **Penhaligon's**. "We started that earlier this year, and we've been introducing a lot more of these fresh visuals over the last year and will do so in the forthcoming six months.

"Whereas some of our customers have a perception of what Penhaligon's is, and don't necessarily think of it as a forward-moving modern brand, and obviously we're trying to change those perceptions when we're trying to attract a younger audience while still retaining the loyal customers," she said. "So definitely looking at data and what images customers are responding to, because some of the images that we've introduced have been very different to the imagery that Penhaligon's might have had three years ago or five years ago.

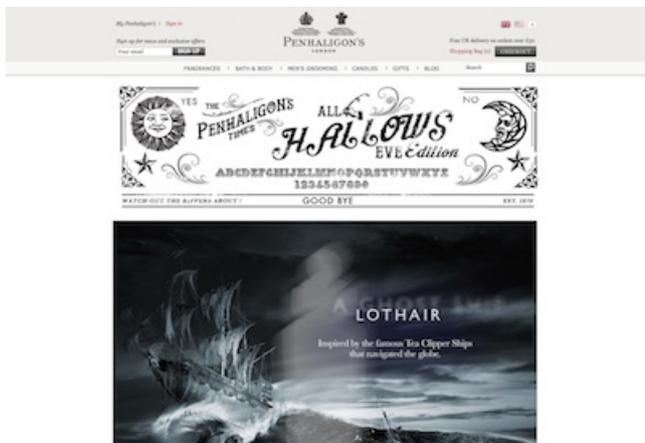
"We're quite lucky in that we've got this deep-rooted history. We're 145-years-old and we have two royal warrants, but that doesn't mean we need to be old and fusty."

### Window shopping

For **Net-A-Porter**, its homepage has to blend its magazine content with product to give enough real estate to both. One way the retailer is looking to solve this is to make its content shoppable, allowing its editorial to serve a dual purpose.

The main goal of Net-A-Porter's site design is to allow the consumer to discover product as quickly as possible, removing any obstacles in her shopping path.

Penhaligon's has to balance driving online sales with sending consumers in-store through its Web site. The perfume house has just released a new homepage design within the past few weeks that creates set areas for different types of content, such as videos, blog posts and in-store events.



*Screenshot of Penhaligon's homepage*

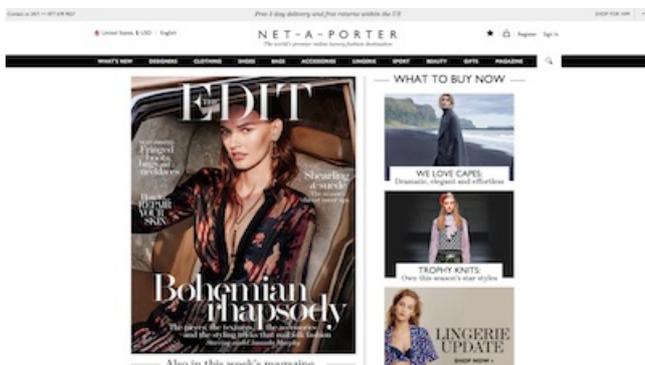
The main focus for Penhaligon's is its blog, now given a tile on the homepage in addition to a link in the navigation bar. Every campaign run by the brand gets recorded there, and the format also allows for a deep dive into what goes into its scents and the perfumers behind its fragrances.

Penhaligon's sees greater sales from those who interact with the blog. Whether the blog creates the sales or those with a penchant to buy are more interested in interacting with the content is unknown, but it provides a platform for reaching the most engaged consumers.

When it comes to building a Web site, choosing where to start is a brand-specific decision. Asked which device they design for first, each panelist had a different answer, depending on where they see the most traction with their customers.

For Net-A-Porter this means mobile first, while Penhaligon's builds from desktop out. Net-A-Porter's client base is interested in adopting the newest technology first, making mobile platforms imperative.

The debate on whether to go responsive or not is also divergent. Net-A-Porter's homepage is currently not responsive, but the retailer has plans to roll out a new design to match other responsive elements of its site.



*Screenshot of Net-A-Porter homepage*

Penhaligon's on the other hand has a mobile site that is not responsive, but which houses bespoke content.

To measure the success of a particular design, brands have a number of options.

Net-A-Porter's head of Web site merchandising Cassandra Bergsland explained that she looks at the homepage as a store window, judging its efficacy by similar metrics, such as how many consumers enter and make a purchase. If a particular product feature is expected to be more commercial than in reality, it was still effective if it drove consumers to other merchandise and an order.

Of the panelists, **Navabi** has the most complex testing mechanism. Chief merchant Miriam Lahage explained that it uses multi variant testing, which runs multiple A/B tests on the same page at the same time, generating more data points to compare.



*Panelists, from left: Net-A-Porter's Cassandra Bergsland, Penhaligon's Jenny Pashkova and Navabi's Miriam Lahage*

The panelists do not listen to opinions over data, whether those ideas come from those inside the brand or from customers.

"What I'm paying attention to is the data. Data doesn't lie," Ms. Lahage said. "Data tells you what a customer really thinks.

"What I'm not paying attention to anymore is what the customer tells me or what the internal stakeholders like or don't like. There's an irreverent sense of who's responsible for what, and really the customer's behavior should be driving everything we do," she said. "And just because somebody doesn't like that model on the homepage but she converts, we need to get over it and move on."

#### Personality profile

Navabi's Ms. Lahage identified serving the needs of existing and new customers as one of the top challenges in homepage design. While a new customer may need to know that the label is plus-size, existing customers may not want or require that messaging.

Penhaligon's is in a period of modernization. As it cleans up its more than 100-year imagery to make it more contemporary, the brand is taking care to not alienate its long time customers.

More current imagery fares better on social media, but the brand keeps its character as a constant. Rather than detracting from the past, modern imagery can give a fresh life to century-old fragrances that might otherwise seem outdated.

Also making sure to speak to existing customers is Net-A-Porter's personalization, particularly for its EIPs, or "extremely important people." On Mr Porter, for instance, those who are logged into their account will see their own name appear in the header in place of Mr Porter's. Other touches, such as languages, remember customers when they return, making the experience specific to them.

Through all of the technological innovations spurring the growth of ecommerce and mobile commerce, everything relates back to the consumer, according to panelists at Luxury Interactive 2015 on Oct. 13.

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](#)).

"The way that we see our visitors interact with content is quite different," Net-A-Porter's Ms. Bergsland said. "We want to make sure that while looking responsive and that we can sort of streamline work for our internal team, it has to make sense for the way that our users are now gaining and using the different sites.

"So we've been doing a lot of testing and research around what customers are doing and how we can best balance both the content but also the commercial side, especially on mobile where we're seeing huge amounts of traffic growth here and there," she said. "It's a totally different mindset and experience that they're coming into.

"I think for us, it's about product discovery as quickly as possible, so making sure that we're inspiring them as they're coming in, but they can easily get to multiple products and there's a journey for the to take, and we're not creating

any dead ends in mobile-specific experience. Whereas for desktop, it's a little bit easier for us to create that, and make a bubble for them to sit in."

Final Take

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

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