

MULTICHANNEL

Reaching a new market does not mean abandoning heritage

October 29, 2015



Gieves & Hawkes bespoke

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

LONDON Savile Row tailor Gieves & Hawkes is using digital to broaden its consumer base, according to an executive from the brand at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015 on Oct. 28.

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Gieves & Hawkes has more than 400 years of history dating back to when it was two separate entities and still sees the majority of its business from loyal longtime consumers. But, as boomers fall out of the market and millennials make their entrance, all brands must adjust their marketing efforts accordingly.

"At the moment we're pretty much an old gentleman's club," said Olivier Van Laer, digital manager at **Gieves & Hawkes**. "We have our loyal, 60-year customer coming in, we offer him a glass of scotch and our tailor will take care of him.

"We do not want to get rid of that, because that is a very valuable market," he said. "However, millennials are the way forward."

Marketing heritage

Gieves & Hawkes deals entirely in menswear, with bespoke tailors, a private tailoring division, a military department and a ready-to-wear line. The brand's challenge lies in incorporating all four elements into new marketing to reach consumers.

To begin, Gieves & Hawkes created a pair of videos showing what it can achieve and how it can be achieved, with the latter focusing on fathers and sons. The video was placed with carefully selected partners to ensure the new target market would see it and show that the brand offers the full package in product, distribution and marketing.



Gieves & Hawkes presentation at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015

As the video suggests, fathers were invited to bring their sons into the store so they could experience the brand together. According to Mr. Van Laer, Gieves & Hawkes boasts consumers who enter the store every week and own little from any other brand, so promoting an opportunity to pass that on to the next generation will help keep the brand relevant in the future.

Often times, adapting to changes wrought by new consumers and current technology can mean making significant shifts in the business model. While Gieves & Hawkes' ready-to-wear collection starts at approximately \$1,200, the bespoke department begins at more than \$8,000, but finding a way to bridge that gap will be integral to continued success.



Gieves & Hawkes ecommerce site

"In the past it was very much, You are our bespoke customer and we will never up-sell you a ready-to-wear shirt with your bespoke order," Mr. Van Laer said. "The tailor is very protective over, You do not touch my customer."

Bridging that gap has involved changing the culture and redesigning the store, but that does not mean abandoning heritage. On the contrary, the brand's commitment to service, which continues to include a scotch for customers walking through the door, reinforces brand identity and creates aspiration as consumers vie to be able to place bespoke orders.



Gieves & Hawkes tailoring

Going digital has also offered possibilities that would not exist in an analog world. The brand is developing a tool that allows tailors and customers to "turn" wheels to visualize suits based on fabric, pattern, what time of year it is and more. The consumer may be worried about purchasing without seeing it first, but digital allows him to see the suit before placing the order.

Staying true to brand heritage also means being weary of the "next big thing." Risk-taking is one thing, but jumping from platform to platform in an attempt to stay current comes with the risk of failure if that "big thing" never materializes and the possibility of looking inauthentic. Instead, brands must look to grow gradually and organically, not all at once.

Reaching out

Other apparel labels are also looking to new technologies to help business.

For example, 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 in London on Oct. 27.

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 ([see story](#)).

Retailers are behind on adapting to 21st century changes to consumer behavior, but current trends offer a clear view of what modifications can be made to succeed, according to The Future Laboratory strategists at the U.S. Retail and Luxury Futures Forum 2015 in New York on Oct. 21.

Everything from accessibility to mobile technology and a wave of emerging markets create opportunities for brands to better reach luxury consumers, but the stigma of "accessibility" and its opposition to "luxury" remains strong, meaning many consumers may turn away from heritage brands as a matter of convenience. In retrospect, the brand strategies that came about in the 1970s and 1980s during a wave of globalization have been successful, with consumers today demanding relationships with brands, but now the brands are the ones trying to catch up with the 21st century consumer ([see story](#)).

Despite the importance of making a change to appeal to new consumers, it is equally important to move at a comfortable pace and remain true to the brand.

"We're moving at a pace which is going faster and faster and faster, and right now we're gaining ground," Mr. Van Laer said. "We are not going to try to hide our heritage and try to be modern and try to be something we're not, because that's where we lose those customers who now still account for the biggest part.

"Then again there's a new customer, so we are making changes," he said.

Final Take

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