

MULTICHANNEL

Marketers must continue to view brand through consumers' eyes

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Belstaff fall/winter 2015 coat

By SARAH JONES

LONDON In a perfect world, all of a brand's marketing activities, including its digital initiatives, would fall under a unified team, according to panelists at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015 on Oct. 28.

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As digital becomes a larger part of the consumer experience, it makes sense to stop thinking of it as a separate entity and begin to incorporate it into the greater marketing strategy. Similarly, even marketers working in the digital space cannot lose sight of the entire customer journey, ensuring that all points in which a consumer chooses to connect with the brand, be it in-store or online, are positive experiences.

"When we've proven and I think it's important to include in marketing the transactional part as well it's not only about communication, it's about going through the full journey and having the full experience," said Perrine Corvaisier, chief digital officer at [Maison Ullens](#).

"It's people who are attracted to the brand, encounter the brand, interact with the brand and have a desire and have the desire fulfilled by opening the orange box at home," she said. "For me, that's the full experience, and that's the full marketing actions we have to do."

Digital divide

This year, Belstaff decided to put 100 percent of its media budget toward digital channels, a 180-degree shift from its previous focus on print as the preferred medium. This experiment ended up showing how important print still is as part of the media mix, and the label will reintroduce print advertisements next year.

Ms. Corvaisier said when she has tested national campaigns, they yield the best results if all channels are used. Consumers are still happy to interact with a brand via phone or receive print mail.

She further explained that since the digital world changes so rapidly, she plans her media mix on a three-month basis rather than setting it for an entire year. At the end of her time at Herms, 20 percent of the overall budget was being used on digital, with some markets calling for up to 30 to 35 percent.



Still from Hermes film; different channels pull for budget

Sales should be an integral part of marketing, as the transaction is part of the branding.

Belstaff vice president of client and omnichannel Alison Conway said that a few years ago, the brand's ecommerce and marketing teams were acting completely separately. Now, the departments are complimentary, operating side by side. Individuals' goals are published throughout the company, making the end point understood across the organization.

While at Herms, Ms. Corvaisier initiated holacracy within her team, eliminating hierarchy to foster collaboration and individual accountability. Every few months, team members would be given a new job description. This worked in parts of her sub-teams, such as social media and email marketers, but she found that the ecommerce processes and flows required the hierarchy and a strong sense of supervision to avoid a collapse.

Among the room and the panelists, the use of freelancers or agencies for design or creative marketing is a common practice.

Ms. Conway said that in some cases Belstaff prefers freelancers to permanent employees since digital media is still evolving. Also, the outside perspectives can offer expertise in specialized areas, such as media planning or buying, which might not exist within the compact team.



Belstaff's Outlaws film

An external voice also comes to a project, such as a store redesign, from a fresh angle compared to the internal employees, who may be too close to the brand.

However, it is still important to bring these consultants to a level of familiarity with the brand. Ms. Corvaisier has freelancers sit in the office with the rest of the team to become part of the day to day operations.

Training for internal employees is also a consideration. If a brand hires specialists in a particular platform, they might not be able to adapt to future technologies without expensive education. Brands may also want to limit the timeframe in which they work with freelancers, since they may get comfortable and cease to bring something new to the table.

Social media may be an area where brands want to own their own voice. Belstaff works with an agency for its social content, and while they are able to publish content, sometimes the messaging would be more efficient or quicker if it was coming from the brand itself.

Managing social in-house is in the works, but that is likely not going to extend to sales associates any time soon. Ms. Corvaisier explained that even while sales staff are excellent at talking about the brand, writing social copy is not where their strengths lie.

Social media practices still vary by brand. Belstaff does listen and respond to its clients who are sharing their brand items, whereas Herms had a long policy of not replying to consumers via social media. If any negativity came

Hermes' way, other consumers would go to bat for the brand, enabling the label to stay out of it.

Making investments

When moderator Milton Pedraza, CEO of Luxury Institute, asked the women what they would do with an imaginary \$1 million extra in their budget, their responses were a mix of client-centric and technology upgrades.



Panel, from left, Milton Pedraza, Alison Conway and Perrine Corvaisier

Ms. Conway would cater to the hyper loyal top 2 percent of clients, for instance flying them to presentations. She would also create a position devoted to focusing on clients, as well as call in additional freelance help for digital design.

On the other hand, Ms. Corvaisier split her theoretical extra budget in four equal pieces, for research and development to prove new concepts without needing to prove ROI, expanding content creation, crunching data and customer service.

Investments currently being considered by Belstaff include non-intrusive ways for the brand to learn more about its customers, such as floorboards in its stores that sense footsteps, currently running as a trial in the label's retail environment.

Belstaff has seen great results in its journey to track its clientele, according to another presentation from Ms. Conway during Luxury Interactive Europe 2015.

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](#)).

Both panelists agreed that success would mean their teams or job titles would not exist anymore. Instead, their functions would be moved into another part of the organization, integrating digital into more of the planning.

However, the final piece of advice from both executives was to ensure that marketers stay in-the-know, with their own brand, competitors and the world at large.

"I look at coming into Belstaff two years ago, and how my focus was then versus how I do things now," Ms. Conway said. "One of my big changes is around making sure that you are really plugged into the stores teams and your sales teams.

"Because at the end of the day, it's really easy to get caught up in product, in great marketing campaigns you're doing, in how perfect the Web site looks, but at the end of the day, you need to be on the shop floor as well, asking your customers and knowing how they interact and what they see," she said. "So it's remembering to keep viewing your brand through your customers' eyes and really understanding and staying in touch with your sales teams."

Final Take

Sarah Jones, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York