

MULTICHANNEL

Starwood gets social to celebrate Cyber Monday

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Starwood's Luxury Collection Buenos Aires

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Starwood Hotels and Resorts is encouraging its patrons to enjoy a vacation like they "meme" it.

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To get consumers in the mood, the chain is offering discounts ranging upwards of 25 percent off bookings made between now and Dec. 6. The offer will help hotels get involved in a busy shopping weekend that includes Black Friday Nov. 27 and Cyber Monday on Nov. 30.

"Weekend memes' add a sophomoric and risky element to the promotion," said Chris Ramey, president of [Affluent Insights](#). "Begging the question whether they're targeting young adults or if the promotion was created by young adults. It's a common mistake for marketers to see their brand through their eyes rather than through the eyes of their best prospects."

Mr. Ramey is not affiliated with Starwood, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

"Weekend memes offer a way to celebrate booking your ideal getaway and socialize that celebration with family and friends," said Melissa Saltonstall, director, field marketing West Region, [Starwood Hotels & Resorts](#). "This feature gets at the emotional response of travel, especially the anticipation leading up to a trip.

"By linking back to our Cyber Monday sale, it becomes even easier for our guests and SPG members to book that dream getaway."

Weekend memes

The offers extend across all of Starwood's brands and are good for stays through Sept. 6. There are 490 offers in total, available across a global selection of Starwood hotels.



Starwood promotional meme

Black Friday and Cyber Monday are among the largest shopping days of the year, but luxury's aversion to discounting, especially big discounts, means that it is a bigger deal for mass-market brands. With other hotels being much more limited in their participation, Starwood has close to an exclusive in luxury hospitality.

"Starwood has long-offered Cyber Monday sales across our portfolio of select serve, upper upscale and luxury brands," Ms. Saltonstall said. "This sale has repeatedly proven to be a successful mechanism for connecting with our Starwood Preferred Guest (SPG) members and guests. The new enhancement this year is the inclusion of hotels and resorts at major destinations around the world, truly a global offering.

Moreover, recent trends show that many consumers are more eager for new experiences than new products. Hotel discounts offer that subset that may be enraptured by but left out of Cyber Monday promotions an opportunity to indulge.

"Time is currency and travel is the real luxury," Mr. Ramey said. "Elevating travel in the Cyber Monday din is a task unto itself."



Luxury Collection Lilianfels, Australia

Aware that the consumer subset that most craves experiential luxury is young and therefore Internet savvy, Starwood is enlisting the booker's help in promotion.

In an email to Starwood Preferred Guest members, the company encouraged guests to "weekend like you meme it" and linked to a video. The GIF-heavy and punny video is composed mostly of screenshots and transitions.

Starwood: Weekend Like You Meme It!

Below the video, consumers can choose from a selection of pre-made GIFs and photos overlaid with texts to download or share. Some memes are destination-specific, while others are a more general celebration of the weekend.

Memes are like currency in social media, and good ones spread like wildfire. By encouraging users to share its memes with the #LifeGoals, Starwood is hoping to capitalize on this trend and create desire.

Living irresistibly

Brands in other sectors have also called on consumers to create memes for promotional effect.

For example, French fashion house Givenchy is encouraging its enthusiasts to "Live Irrsistible," to promote the brand's latest fragrance venture.

With actress Amanda Seyfried as a repeat brand ambassador, the Live Irrsistible fragrance was launched in June, but Givenchy limited its promotional communications for the scent. When promotions did begin, the brand teased candid images of Ms. Seyfried holding up countdown signs to increase anticipation for a "secret" debut ([see story](#)).

Other hotels have also encouraged consumers to share news about their travels on social media.

For example, in Oct. 2014 The Ritz-Carlton began allowing guests to further personalize the memories of their stay at one of its hotels with a mobile application update.

With the new version of the app, consumers can take a photo or choose an existing image in their library and add frames, stamps and other embellishments to make it into a unique poster. As fans share the posters on social media, these will stand out from other basic images, creating more of a branded presence ([see story](#)).

"Starwood's database of Preferred Guests should be sacred and in silos," Mr. Ramey said. "One message won't fit all any more than one brand will resonate with everyone.

"Asking affluent consumers for testimony to sale or to act as connectors to their Facebook friends is a tall order," he said. "There's a fine line between being malleable and manipulated. Woe be to any brand that gets it wrong."

"Starwood strives to engage with socially-active travelers across all age groups, communicating with our guests where they are and helping them to convey the excitement of travel," Ms. Saltonstall said. "Starwood has always offered great promotions, inspirational destinations, and fun and engaging content to help connect with all of our guests, younger guests included."

Final Take

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