

INTERNET

Saks acquaints consumers with Toronto through locals' perspectives

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Sam and Calli Beckerman for Saks uTOpia

By SARAH JONES

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is celebrating the diverse personalities that call Toronto home in a documentary series teasing its upcoming openings in the Canadian city.

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For the digital "Saks uTOpia," the retailer interviewed nine influencers, ranging from sports stars to top chefs, in their native Toronto. Saks has launched a number of social initiatives to show its embrace of its new home in the north, which may help create a connection with consumers before doors open in February.

"Celebrating the city through some of the most interesting and compelling influencers is a brilliant idea as Saks Canada opens two new stores in the city," said Marko Muellner, digital vice president and group director at [Edelman](#), Portland.

"Picking a diverse set of people and stories expands the appeal across key audiences and invites consumers to stay tuned during the entire launch of the campaign and opening of the stores," he said. "A great idea well-executed, it's refreshing."

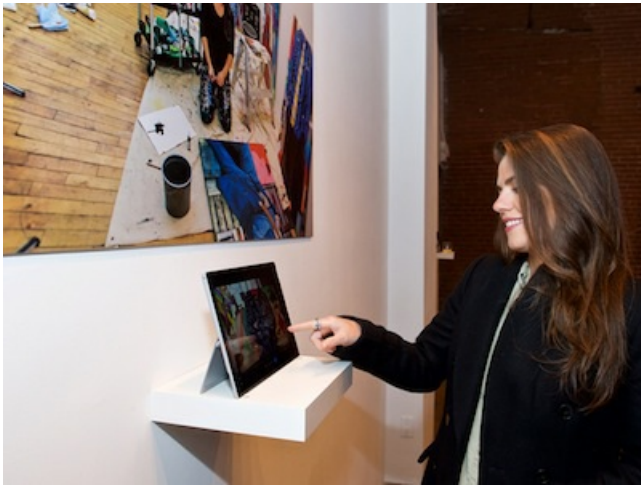
Mr. Muellner is not affiliated with Saks, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Saks did not respond before press deadline.

Point of view

Saks uTOpia kicked off on Jan. 11. To commemorate the launch, Saks hosted an event, including a dinner, video screening and gallery viewing of the series, all of which was documented on a new Snapchat account.

Throughout the evening, uTOpia subject and photographer Irving DeJong took the reins of the account, posting videos of his fellow profiled Torontonians and capturing snippets of the documentaries to give consumers a taste of the full campaign.



uTOpia subject Samara Shuter views her shoot on a tablet

On the Saks POV blog, the retailer introduces the tastemakers with a video and post. The short film opens with a drawing of the Saks Eaton Centre at Queen Street store, which will open Feb. 18.

The influencers are then shown standing in front of the Toronto skyline. Each of them then delivers a short line about what Toronto means to them and how it inspires them.

Saks Fifth Avenue Canada Presents... #saksuTOpia

In addition to Mr. DeJong, Saks chose sisters and fashion bloggers Samantha and Caillianne Beckerman, design firm partners George Yabu and Glenn Pushelberg, artist Samara Shuter, hockey player Nazem Samir Kadri, chef Rob Gentile and ballerina Sonia Rodriguez to star in its campaign.



Sonia Rodriguez for Saks uTOpia

On Jan. 12, Saks released the first profile in the series, which focuses on the Beckerman twins. Standing on a Toronto street, the pair talk about how digital has changed fashion and explain how they are a part of giving fashionistas the information they want very quickly.

They also share their thoughts on the Toronto fashion scene, which they say is growing.

Saks Canada Presents... #saksuTOpia with Sam & Cailli Beckerman

In addition to Saks POV, consumers can follow the story across the brand's social channels, including its @Saks_Canada Twitter.

"Snapchat is increasingly a place for younger people to share photos and discover or watch rich content from brands and publishers," Mr. Muellner said. "The engagement rates—video views, photo shares, etc.—on Snapchat are astounding, and for brands that have an authentic appeal to the younger audiences that play there, it can be a very fun and effective place to be.

"Leading with the uTOPIA stories about real people in a great city hits right at the sweet spot of Snapchat and makes a lot of sense for the Saks brand," he said.

Going north

Before it officially opens in Toronto, Saks is forging ties with its new neighbors through a number of digital initiatives.

The chain teased the upcoming opening of its first Canadian locations by capturing a long-distance love affair that crosses borders.

"I Left My Heart in Toronto" shows a romantic meet-up between bicoastal American blogger Alyssa Campanella and her Toronto-dwelling actor boyfriend Torrance Coombs in his hometown. As Saks prepares for the opening of two new stores in Toronto, showing Canada affection on its channels will likely resonate with its new potential consumers to the north ([see story](#)).

Saks is working on making a good first impression as it enters the Canadian retail landscape.

Saks' first department stores in Canada will be located in Toronto's Eaton Centre and Sherway Gardens, both of which have opening dates slated for February 2016. As anticipation mounts and opening day approaches, Saks has unveiled the plans for its Canadian debut to differentiate its stores from retailers already established in the market ([see story](#)).

"This campaign has the potential to reach a broad swath of key audiences for Saks," Mr. Muellner said. "It will resonate with existing loyalists who will love the celebration of their city and the recognition of its diversity and cultural attributes.

"Younger audiences will love the stories and the well-executed campaigns across social networks and into Snapchat," he said. "And multicultural and even hockey fans will appreciate the depth Saks is going to be of the place and present an authentic sense of the city.

"It takes discipline to keep the brand in the background but in this case, Saks will gain much more attention and good will than any straight ahead branding effort could provide."