

MULTICHANNEL

Saks extends associates' knowledge, expertise to curated online service

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Courtesy of Stuart Weitzman for Saks Fifth Avenue

By JEN KING

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is personalizing its online shopping experience to transfer the service received in-store to anywhere consumers wish to shop.

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In recent months, omnichannel strategy has taken hold over retailing, with brands coming to execute programs that enhance the relationship between in-store shopping and that conducted online. As such, the luxury industry will benefit from increasing personalized interaction online as a reflection, and continuation, of the experience while in a physical store location, thus offering its consumers a consistent presentation and level of service regardless of the platform.

"When it comes to luxury shopping, there is no substitute for the personalized experience offered by a knowledgeable Saks Associate," said Joe Milano, senior vice president, general manager, digital retail and ecommerce at [Saks Fifth Avenue](#), New York.

"Providing our customers with the same high-touch Saks experience and store environment online will not only help us strengthen relationships with existing customers, but also allow us to connect personally with the saks.com customer," he said.

"Saks Fifth Avenue prides itself on the relationships and experiences built between its associates and customers. With this new technology, Saks has the ability to provide all customers the same 1 to 1 personalized experience no matter the channel."

Personal shoppers online

Saks' latest endeavor introduces a consumer offering that brings the retailer's in-store experience directly to its online shoppers. Through the initiative, consumers can connect with Saks Associates around the clock, every day of the week, to reap the benefits of its personalized services.

For the online service program, Saks teamed with retail technology firm Salesfloor. As a software-as-a-service (SaaS) platform, Salesfloor works to connect local retail sales associates with online shoppers to create a personalized experience.

With quick integration that melds easily with a retailer's existing CRM and client software, Salesfloor can be customized to fit with a retailer's specifications. According to Salesfloor, retailers that partner with its SaaS platform

see a tenfold lift in online conversations, and up to a 75 percent increase in average order value.

"In today's world we have omni-channel customers, therefore associates in the store need to be omnichannel as well, so they can serve the customer even after they have left the store," said Oscar Sachs, CEO of [Salesfloor](#).

"Salesfloor redefines the role of a sales associate so that they can directly drive the online business as much as the in-store business.

"With Salesfloor, retailers can empower associates to develop relationships at scale with customers and to personalize the online experience with curated product, content and live service," he said.

Using Salesfloor's SaaS, Saks now has the ability to create customizable saks.com boutique pages with the help of its team of dedicated Saks Associates. Each customized online boutique will be personally curated by a Saks Associate to include an assortment of merchandise and will be easily found through a dedicated URL.

Similar to a favorite in-store associate, consumers can continue to refer to the dedicated URL that houses their curated merchandise picks based on their personal taste and needs. The program also gives Saks Associates another way to connect with new and established consumers in the online space.

Connections can be had over hand-picked merchandise, styling expertise and industry knowledge. Further adapting to how the consumer wishes to shop, the Saks Associates can be reached via live chat, email or through scheduled appointments.

Additional touchpoints include the Saks Associate's ability to showcase their online storefronts to consumers through email and social media tools built within a mobile application.

"Luxury brands depend on creating relationships with their customers and offering a high level of service," Mr. Sachs said. "In-store, luxury brands do a great job at differentiating themselves from the competition through store design, sales associates and merchandising.

"However online the differentiation is much more narrow and retailers are struggling to maintain loyal online customers, which is increasingly becoming a large part of the retail business," he said. "With Salesfloor, retailers can now leverage their trusted associates to better serve the online customer and to personalize the online experience."

Furthering experience

The human element is going to be the top differentiator among luxury brands going forward, according to the CEO of Luxury Institute at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015.

As consumers increasingly experience the world through screens, they will come to crave the now-rare human connection. Here is where luxury brands can help themselves stand apart by outperforming their peers at relationship building and delivering a worthwhile personal touch ([see story](#)).

For instance, department store chain Neiman Marcus is changing the apparel shopping experience for consumers with a new digital mirror that remembers users.

The Memory Mirror takes a 360-degree video of a client modeling a particular outfit, allowing them to see clothing on themselves from all angles as well as save and share the visual. This interactive digital touchpoint will alter the in-store experience for Neiman Marcus' consumers and further empower sales associates to provide customer service ([see story](#)).

Also, retailer Nordstrom expanded its mobile commerce capabilities with a new feature that enables shopping via text message.

The retailer claims its TextStyle is the first of its kind for a department store in the United States, allowing for a secure, one-to-one buying experience between a consumer and a sales associate. Consumers are constantly connected to their phones, so this enables Nordstrom to serve them in a personal way no matter where they are ([see story](#)).

"Retail's landscape is changing customers demand a seamless shopping experience across all channels," Saks' Mr. Milano said. "To capitalize on this, Saks Fifth Avenue found a digital solution that combines our highest trafficked channel with our highest converting channel, our stores. Now, Saks Associates can connect directly to customers 24/7 via this new technology."

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