

COLUMNS

Why and how content marketing works for luxury

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Content marketing is a buzzword in the marketing world, but what does that actually mean and what is its role for luxury brands?

Content marketing, or branded content, is brand-related content with which consumers, or in our case, luxury consumers, actually choose to engage. It has value for the audience first whether entertainment, information or other value and the brand second.

Content can live in marketing and media channels, but is not a channel itself. Content can be a spoke or a hub: it can be distributed through media, or part of a destination.

Importantly, content is a means of engagement with current and prospective customers, and gives the luxury brand its own voice.

For luxury brands, the chief value of content marketing lies in its ability to reel in, persuade and evangelize the most discerning audience in a language and elevated aesthetic that is particular to luxury.

Starting place for luxury content

Whether a customer voluntarily comes to a brand, or a brand reaches out to the customer, in the world of luxury, the customer needs to want to engage with the content.

In a classical sense of luxury, this means stunning photographic imagery with a superb photographer with a keen eye and high production values, or potentially a television spot.

Beyond stunning imagery, luxury branded content is often predictable: the brand's history, focus on materials and production, or cultural associations.

However, the digital age is imbuing a whole new level of content, compelling luxury brands to expand their range of visual, written and video material, and to communicate the brand's values and story in new ways.

When done properly, the result is true connection between the brand and its consumers, and consumers' desire for further engagement with the brand.

Content deployment now: owned versus earned versus paid media

Content can live in a luxury brand's owned channels: the Web site, social media channels, imagery or video screens in retail stores.

Oftentimes, customers specifically visit the brand world to read blogs, learn about the brand's history and view products.

Content marketing becomes a highly effective tool in breaking down barriers to discovery and purchase.

However, great content can often be a key recruitment mechanic for customer acquisition by deploying content via native advertising, paid social advertising, in display advertising or, increasingly, via social influencers in their blogs or Instagram feeds.

Whether still images or dynamic video, high-quality content with superior production values has the power to intrigue luxury consumers and draw them into the brand world. These tactics include display advertising with click-through, sharing of social media or creative blogger links to achieve search engine optimisation.

New formats of content marketing in luxury and fashion

Content is now evolving even further to encompass long-form video series, elaborate blogs updated multiple times per day, shoppable video and city guide applications.

Long-form video series

Everyone loves a good story, and the luxury consumer is no exception. The new frontier is branded series, styled like a Netflix series, with characters, cliff-hangers and the like.

Kate Spade's second series of its #Missadventure campaign, featuring four girlfriends on the most unexpected, exciting and awkward adventures, hits all the right notes and will most likely have young fashion lovers thinking, "That sounds exactly like what I'd say."

By casting relatable, quirky characters, the brand successfully created content that resonates with the audience and spurs brand engagement.

Insider guide apps

Luxury brands know that their discerning customers value insider knowledge where are the hot places to go in a city they are visiting, how to get a table at the most sought-after restaurants or where to purchase a limited edition designer piece.

Louis Vuitton is not only a globalista brand, but is intrinsically tied to travel with its luggage and iconic trunk.

The French brand's new app-based "chic, anti-tourist" city guides deliver insider tips on where to go in 25 global cities including Paris, New York and the all-important Asian cities including Shanghai, Beijing and Bangkok.

While some content is free, the full app costs \$9.99 per city and people are paying for it.

Shoppable videos

We are just at the starting point of a key turning point in content marketing: shoppable video.

We are talking music videos, short stories or series as per above, or any other form of video content that is shopping enabled.

While enjoying the song or story, the luxury consumer can click on anything from the clothes that the performers are wearing to furniture or jewellery, or what have you, and instantly purchase.

An example includes MCM's recent Christmas shoppable video, "The Invitation," which casts a playful look at a couple who has been invited to two holiday parties going through a series of outfit changes.

Other examples include Temperley's shoppable video on Net-A-Porter, and Juicy Couture and ASOS enabling click-throughs to product pages from their YouTube videos.

Micro-content

Snapchat has heroed a new form of content enjoyed by millennials tiny bits of content.

Brands from Louis Vuitton to Burberry have already adopted Snapchat, and are revealing intriguing brand stories and collections through the app.

Fendi, for example, partnered with influencer Negin Mirsalehi to provide a behind-the-scenes Snapchat tour of the Fendi SS16 fashion show at Milan Fashion Week, and also hooked up with Kendall Jenner and Bella Hadid, who together took over the Fendi Snapchat account to bring fans on a stylish tour around Rome.

Interactive personalized content

The luxury purchase journey is intimate, experiential and immersive.

Louis Vuitton's "LV & Me" jewellery campaign giving its customers the opportunity to create personalised content. Users could input their names onto the site, and a personalized video would be generated just for them.

Personalization is a great way for luxury brands to connect with hard-to-reach consumers and show that the brand is interested in building a relationship.

Customer stories

Luxury consumers are concerned with who else buys or wears the brand. This creates a sense of belonging and delivers personality to the brand.

Tesla, which produces cars in the six-figure range, has a whole section on its Web site dedicated to customer stories.

First-hand testimonials provide social proof for the hesitant luxury customer. It makes the brand relatable and almost gives permission to the consumer to splash on the purchase.

Another example is Danish shoe brand Ecco, which launched a #partofmyworld campaign for its SS16 (spring summer 2016) line, Ecco Intrinsic.

In addition to sending influencers from around the world the Ecco Intrinsic sneakers to sample, the brand also encouraged customers to post pictures of their sneakers with the hashtag.

Apart from showcasing how Ecco fits into their customers' lives, the #partofmyworld initiative also nurtures a community of Ecco fanatics from across the globe.

IN A WORLD where consumers are receiving thousands of brand messages a day, and at a time where ad blockers are increasingly being deployed by consumers, brands need to find a way to truly connect with consumers by entertaining them, providing them with insight and information they want, or delivering a sense of belonging.

High-quality, engaging content marketing has the potential to cut through the marketing challenges for customer attention faced by luxury brands, bringing both loyalty and new customers.

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