

EVENTS/CAUSES

What luxury brands are doing to help Japan victims

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By RACHEL LAMB

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Luxury brands are trying to reach consumers via social media and ecommerce sites to quickly and efficiently spread awareness about how to help those affected by the natural disasters in Japan last week.

Brands such as Bergdorf Goodman, Gilt Groupe, David Yurman, Gucci and Swarovski are using Facebook and Twitter to encourage consumers to donate money to the Red Cross and other disaster-relief organizations dedicated to helping those affected by the tsunami and earthquake in Japan. Others have used their Web sites to publicize their support for the relief organizations.

"The disparity between the haves and the have-nots is at an all-time highpoint in terms of being in the spotlight of public discourse, the implication being more and more accentuated," said Greg Furman, president of the Luxury Marketing Council, New York.

"It really behooves luxury brands to consolidate their corporate citizenship and not-for-profit giving," he said. "Instead of giving to many causes at once, they are aligning their corporate citizenship with causes that really make sense in terms of the brand's mission.

"Those that can give, like luxury brands, are doing more to help those in need."

On March 11, a 9-magnitude earthquake occurred 80 miles offshore from Japan. Soon after, the country was hit with a tsunami, with waves travelling at 500 miles per hour that devastated parts of the northern coast.

Many luxury brands are offering prayers or condolences via Twitter, and encouraging consumers to give back by donating money to disaster-relief organizations dedicated to helping victims in Japan.

Giving back

Brands are getting the word out via social media in a few different ways.

Gucci and Swarovski are offering condolences for those affected and encouraging their Twitter followers to text keywords such as Red Cross or The Salvation Army to automatically donate \$10 to the organization. They also use a short code to link to a donation page.



Gucci's Twitter account

Bergdorf Goodman uses Twitter to link to recent articles that explain different ways that consumers can help, such as buying things that benefit relief victims or Web sites to organizations that are helping those in Japan.

The retailer also devoted a section on its Facebook page that shows consumers where they can donate money or learn more information about how they can help.

Bergdorf Goodman ▶ **Earthquake Relief**

Retail and Consumer Merchandise

<p>give.care.share Helping the victims of the earthquake</p>  <p>CHARITY NAVIGATOR Your Guide To Intelligent Giving</p> <p><i>See how to help most effectively</i></p>	<p>f t g+ r</p> <p>TEXT & DONATE</p> <p>JAPANESE RED CROSS "REDCROSS" to 90999</p> <p>INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORP "MED" to 80888</p> <p>SALVATION ARMY "JAPAN" OR "QUAKE" to 80888</p> <p>Get more tips on Mashable</p>
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Bergdorf helps customers learn more information about how to help via Facebook

David Yurman is also encouraging customers to donate to relief funds via Facebook by linking different organizations to its social media page.

The bigger the better

Other brands are giving in bigger ways.

Lexus has proclaimed via Facebook its pledge to donate \$3.75 million toward the relief efforts.



Lexus' Facebook page

Additionally, Gilt City has partnered with GlobalGiving, an organization that gives to various relief efforts.



Gilt City's section on GlobalGiving.com

Gilt City is asking consumers via its Web site and social media efforts to donate to GlobalGiving. Affluent consumers can give to the emergency aid fund for survivors or give to the organizations that are providing shelter and refuge.

"Gilt City's motive is simple, to stand united in helping our Japanese family and friends during their time of need," said Nate Richardson, president of Gilt City, New York. "We partnered with GlobalGiving in order to give aid to on-the-ground organizations providing

emergency services.”

In addition to the added awareness, Gilt City is matching profits that its customers give.

Gilt Groupe’s United States team is planning to match all U.S. employee donations made to assist in the relief efforts.

In Japan, Gilt City Tokyo is asking members to donate 500 yen (\$6.12) where all money will go directly to the Japan Red Cross.

Gilt City Tokyo will also match up to 2,000 of these donations for a total donation of 1 million yen (\$12,250), per Mr. Richardson.

Just a marketing ploy?

Most experts are crediting brands aiding the victims with having the right motivation.

Luxury brands are encouraging consumers to make contributions, and using social media is affective in terms of letting customers know how easy it is to do, per Ron Kurtz, president of the American Affluence Research Center, Atlanta.

Moreover, there is no evidence that the luxury brand will get anything in return if they donate to the disaster funds. Corporate altruism is at work here.

That said, there are many ways that luxury brands can give back.

According to Mr. Kurtz, raising awareness of different organizations is a great way to go.

“There are some organizations that are doing a good job with disaster relief, but no one really knows about them because they’re on a smaller scale,” Mr. Kurtz said. “However, if brands are linking to these types of organizations, they can encourage others to give in various ways.”

To go along with that, the Luxury Marketing Council’s Mr. Furman believes that brands are not donating just because they think it makes them look good. Brands that give significant amounts of money must legitimately want to donate to the cause.

In addition to brands simply wanting to do the right thing, this issue hits close to home for many companies.

Japan is a huge luxury market, and in addition to the economic hit that brands may take, many brands have offices in the country that were affected by the tsunami and earthquake.

“We have offices in Tokyo, so this disaster directly impacted our colleagues and friends,” Gilt City’s Mr. Richardson said. “We wanted to give our members the opportunity to help in our efforts to provide aid in Japan.

“Our members look to us to provide experiences that make them feel good, and what better way to accomplish that goal than by giving them the chance to help others,” he said.

Final Take

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