

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Mulberry spotlights reinvented handbag design with modern personalities

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Mulberry Bayswater bag designed by Johnny Coca

By SARAH JONES

British apparel and accessories label Mulberry is gathering a diverse cast of women for a digital campaign surrounding its newly remodeled Bayswater handbag.

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The #MyBayswater project highlights the bag through the lens of women in the tech, media and creative space, allowing them to tell the story of its design details. As the brand continues its transition under the creative direction of recently appointed Johnny Coca, it will have to find ways to excite a new audience while avoiding alienating its existing loyal clientele.

"Without buzz, a product launch cannot be successful," said Markella Haynes, social media community manager at [MDG Advertising](#), Boca Raton, FL. "Even with the built-in brand recognition of Mulberry and Johnny Coca, it's critical for a launch of this kind to build in user engagement to test for all consumer feedback and generate strong word-of-mouth marketing as both consumers and influencers integrate the bag into their daily lives.

"Johnny Coca wants to 'build on [their] heritage rather than create something completely new.' And that's exactly what this user-generated content campaign does for Mulberry," she said. "Each contributor is able to broadcast what the Mulberry Bayswater means to them, whether it be their first luxury handbag, purchased as a special gift after an achievement, or just because it screams professional woman.

"When other Instagram users look through the hashtag and see the dazzling photos of women holding the bag, they'll notice just how rich Mulberry's culture and past is, which will create buzz for their new look. As they say on their Web site, adding your #MyBayswater photo will make you part of the Mulberry story, whether you're a loyal customer or buying your first bag."

Ms. Haynes is not affiliated with Mulberry, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

[Mulberry](#) did not respond before press deadline.

New direction

After being sans creative director for an extended period of time, Mulberry hired Mr. Coca in November 2014 from Cline, where he served as the French brand's head design director, but he did not begin designing for the house until eight months after his appointment was announced ([see story](#)). As an introduction to Mr. Coca and the direction he

plans to bring Mulberry, the brand created a social video ahead of the designer's first runway show for the house, held in February ([see story](#)).

As part of the brand's reinvention under the designer's hand, Mulberry's iconic Bayswater has received a makeover. The handbag, with its flap top and postman's lock closure, has been an enduring style for the brand for more than a decade, becoming a classic.



Original Bayswater design

Mr. Coca's new, modernized Bayswater is more angular than its predecessor, featuring a trapezoidal, structured body.

The bag, which was originally introduced in neutral tones including oak, chocolate and black, has been fashioned in many colors of the rainbow over its lifetime. Mr. Coca's stamp on the bag's color palette is the addition of a bright candy pink and a canary yellow.



Mulberry ad campaign image featuring the new Bayswater

Explaining the changes to its audience, Mulberry shared a story on its Web site, which contains quotes from Mr. Coca about his reasoning.

Helping consumers decide how to style and carry the new Bayswater, Mulberry has launched a social and digital campaign. On its Web site and Instagram account, the brand shares images and commentary from "modern women."

The personalities featured range from a mom of three to a history student. Along with photos of the women, Mulberry includes a quote from them, in which they explain what they love about the bag.

For instance, the director of Cond Nast video, Jacqui Kavanagh, talks of how the bag fits her role at the office, as she can fit her laptop while looking chic. Others comment on its practicality for their own lives or talk of the appeal of design.



"The Bayswater is super practical for my day - chic, minimal, but fits my laptop! My role is to oversee the 'agency' side of the Conde Nast video department, working with brand partners to evolve their advertising opportunities into video content co-creation." Jacqui Kavanagh, Commercial Director Conde Nast Video for #MyBayswater | Discover the collection on mulberry.com

A photo posted by Mulberry (@mulberryengland) on May 24, 2016 at 7:48am PDT

Consumers are also invited to share an image of themselves with the hashtag #MyBayswater.

On social media, response to the redesign has been mixed, with some embracing the new colors and shape, while others yearn for the continuation of their beloved classic. As of press time, both the new and previous Bayswater

designs are available for purchase online.

"Working with influencers will only be effective for the long-term if they are genuinely aligned with the brand," said [Brian Honigman](#), New York-based content marketing consultant and social media marketer. "Ensuring these influencers have some affinity for the Mulberry brand is key and second to that, if they reach the demographics that the brand is trying to get in front of today.

"Without either element, working with influencers may only provide short-term engagement and awareness but nothing more," he said. "Success comes down to how well research Mulberry and their partners were in finding the right influencers to work with."

Creative leadership

Prior to Mr. Coca's arrival, Mulberry was with a singular design head. Instead, it relied on influential models, including Georgia May Jagger and Cara Delevingne, to bring new voices to its fashions.

British apparel and accessories label Mulberry targeted younger consumers with a handbag collection designed by It girl model Ms. Delevingne.

Since Mulberry is considered a classic brand, shaking things up with a model-infused collection helped introduce the brand to a new audience ([see story](#)).

Mulberry's handbag sales struggled in 2014, as a move upmarket hurt its earnings. Following losses in the first half of the year ending Sept. 30, in which the brand issued three profit warnings, sales of more moderately priced items within the nine weeks ending Nov. 29 helped Mulberry's total sales rise 8 percent ([see story](#)).

In 2015, the brand announced it had achieved 12 months of continual growth in women's handbags, its largest category.

With any creative changes at a fashion house, loyal consumers may need help adjusting to a new look. Other brands have launched campaigns for this purpose.

Italian fashion label Emilio Pucci delved into the new vision of creative director Massimo Giorgetti through a dedicated microsite.

"The Pilot Episode" centered on the designer's first collection for the house, creating a space for consumers to explore the inspiration behind the apparel and accessories. As Pucci's aesthetic shifts along with the creative talent behind the brand, providing context around this first collection will help consumers make the transition ([see story](#)).

"As with any brand steeped in history and culture, Mulberry can avoid alienating its loyal clientele by harkening back to prior successes while still pushing forward with modern updates," Ms. Haynes said. "As Johnny Coca has confirmed, 'That is my plan for Mulberry, to push the limit and challenge convention. But also to be real and honest, respecting the rules of such a special part of Britain.'

Ultimately, the biggest risk for Mulberry would be to deviate too far from their history in search of something new," she said. "As long as there are hints of tradition in quality and design, there shouldn't be any problems in retaining loyal clients."