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How to drive influencer engagement through retail

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French footwear maker J.M. Weston has opened a pop-up store in the Gaumont Ambassade at 50 avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris before the famed cinema undergoes a makeover

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Influencers are playing an increasingly important role in the marketing world, particularly for luxury retailers looking to boost brand loyalty.

Recent studies suggest that recommendations from social influencers hold as much weight as those made by family and friends. It is known that 74 percent of consumers turn to social media before making purchase decisions.

Influencers at the tops of their respective categories have the power to build this trust and rally consumers, establishing a luxury brand as one worth trying, experiencing, and eventually loyally following in a way traditional advertising simply cannot.

But to successfully leverage this power, I recommend brands consider taking a two-pronged approach to influencer engagement.

First, they must meet influencers where they already are to get them through the door.

Then, retailers and luxury labels must ensure that influencers and their followers build authentic connections with their brands while in-store, driving them to return time after time.

Start with location

To start, brands especially in the luxury space must not underestimate the importance of location.

It is much more logical to place flagships and retail experiences, such as Cadillac House or J.M. Weston's cinematic pop-up, in media epicenters such as New York's Meatpacking District or along Paris' Champs-Élysées. These neighborhoods are magnets for influencers they are the places consumers will most want to play with your brand.

That said, luxury brands should not view these retail locations as a dollar play per-square-footage.

As challenging as it is to accept, most flagships in the Meatpacking District will barely break even in sales.

Instead, brands should view these stores as billboards with a pulse, as I like to call them.

The purpose is for the right consumers in the influencer sphere and beyond to see and learn more about your brand, which cannot be done if your physical store is located in a dead, low-traffic area, no matter how cheap the rent may be.

Build connections through experiences

Location is just one necessary element in engaging influencers.

But before brands can effectively connect with these high-profile consumers be they social media celebrities or acclaimed sneakerheads they must create experiences worth tweeting, snapping or blogging about.

In some cases, this may start with hosting exclusive parties and events such as top-tier streetwear label Kith.

Seeing star athletes and hip-hop artists such as Victor Cruz and Fabolous promoting a brand and sharing their luxurious experiences with followers inherently evokes envy, further convincing consumers that this retailer is the place to see and be seen.

Adding entertainment and utility to your retail mix is another avenue for attracting influencers, and driving foot traffic long-term.

Brands such as Samsung have seen great success by turning their flagships into community hubs for hosting concerts, cooking demonstrations and even health and wellness activities, including run clubs or yoga classes.

In Samsung's case, all of these experiences are powered by their technology, without even selling any product a practice luxury labels would be wise to adopt.

Naturally, influencers will be much more likely to speak positively about your brand if they have benefitted from an experience with it, thus encouraging their followers to seek the same benefits.

Instead of just pushing shoppers to buy the latest accessory, retailers should invite consumers to experience their products in a way that creates a personal connection with the brand in different settings throughout the year, building consistent demand and a reason to return.

ULTIMATELY, TO ATTRACT influential consumers and ensure that they spread a brand's message organically and positively, luxury retailers must do two things: meet influencers where they are, and provide powerful, enjoyable brand experiences there be they exclusive or open to all.

Make your retailer the place to play, the place to be, and you will attract consumers from the top down.



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