

COLUMNS

## Emotion: The heart of selling luxury online

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*Canadian menswear retailer Harry Rosen bridges the physical and digital channels by encouraging in-store pickup of merchandise. Image credits: Harry Rosen*

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Why has selling luxury online been so elusive? And why did it take so long for true purveyors of luxury to come to the online table?

Consider that in 2013, Chanel's global fashion director said that clothing needed to be seen and felt in order to be understood. Finally, in 2015, the company limped into launching an online presence that is coming pretty late to the party.

I would like to posit that when it comes to luxury, a big factor is emotion. So how do you create emotion online?

Look and feel

Emotion is at the heart of the experience many customers have with luxury goods.

Whether it is the craftsmanship and style of the merchandise itself or the pampering that consumers receive in-store or a mixture of elements, it is clear that the experience and the emotion that is irrevocably tied to it is at the center of the luxury market's charm.

Luxury retailers stand out from mass-market companies through positive differentiation, making their wares and the overall brand desirable to the right customer demographics.

From creating a sense of exclusivity to pampering customers and offering unique, desirable products and designs, the luxury market is squarely focused on creating a personal touch for customers.

To effectively appeal to younger customers who may not show as much initial interest in the luxury market as older shoppers who already have strong loyalties and affinity for high-class goods, your brand needs to innovate.

Successfully adapting your high-touch, individually focused in-store experiences to the world of ecommerce is critical, and never as simple as simply offering your wares online.

Making every customer feel unique and valued is always the goal, but how that point is reached is rapidly changing. How can this upmarket treatment of high-value customers translate into an effective online presence? It frequently

means using digital platforms and solutions in novel ways, uncommon in mass-market ecommerce, to bridge the online and in-store experiences, and continue providing the experiences customers enjoy so much.

Ultimately, your brand needs to transcend the digital space into the physical space with your products and customer experience.

With the right approach, you can offer levels of service and attention that are impossible for other ecommerce retailers, even giants such as Amazon, to provide.

#### Examples of luxury-level service

Consider these three distinct examples of a luxury brand using digital channels to drive customer interactions and sales in ways that are not or cannot be used effectively in the mass market:

##### 1. Buy online, finish in store

High-end Canadian menswear retailer Harry Rosen offers a variety of bespoke and made-to-measure dress shirts, suits and other key wardrobe pieces for sale online.

The retailer bridges the gap between digital and physical experiences by offering and encouraging in-store pickup, where final adjustments are made and each customer receives the level of attention commensurate with the retailer's status in the market and the customer's status in the retailer's mind.

Your brand should regularly look for ways to use digital to drive customers to your store.

While fruitful opportunities exist to make sales exclusively through ecommerce channels, the unique nature of luxury goods means that the experience and emotion need to be highlighted. That sort of action is frequently best taken in-store, alone or in concert with digital assistance and motivation.

Depending on the types of luxury goods sold, many strategies can provide strong results.

Tiffany, for example, allows customers to select styles and customization for some products, and then ships them once completed.

When viewed with the high quality of the items themselves in mind, Tiffany offers an experience that is rarely seen in the mass-market online retail world.

#### *Tiffany & Co.: Introducing Lady Gaga for Tiffany HardWear*

##### 2. Beacons improve the one-on-one luxury experience

One leading practice involves beacon location-sensitive tools that are most frequently used to collect customer data and share information and deals in-store to connect customers and staff.

With some luxury brands frequently working with clientele who are not particularly focused on using their mobile devices for ecommerce, this is a chance to harness the power of digital to create a more impactful in-store experience.

Consider this scenario: a sales associate in the store is notified whenever a customer walks in the door of a physical retail location by the beacon. The associate provides suggestions and guides each guest individually, going through databases using customer purchase history to highlight potential buys, especially new items.

These associates will also send recommendations digitally, engaging the customer in a unique, high-touch and personalized manner.

This kind of focused, personalized experience engages customer even those who are not heavy users of mobile devices. It is the type of service that your brand is known for providing while mass-market retailers are not, and it is made new and exciting for shoppers through the inclusion of a digital element.

##### 3. Keeping one's closet in order

Another powerful tool deployed by leading luxury brands is a closet tracker mobile application.

This tool is another variation of the high-end experience that drives engagement and encourages customers to not only make purchases, but have positive and long-lasting interactions with your brand as well. It also addresses a common issue for regular luxury shoppers: not knowing what is in one's closet.

The app draws on the company's stored information about past purchases, combined with a relatively small amount of data entered by each customer, to create a digital accounting of the items already inside of a shopper's closet.

This is a demonstration that an app tailored to customer wants and needs has the power to do much more than boost your sales. It provides a valuable service while enhancing customer perception of the brand.

With this information in hand, your staff can help customers identify what they already own while shopping, and avoid purchasing duplicates and very similar items.

While customers occasionally have to update their virtual closet, the bulk of the work is taken care of by the retailer. This stands in stark contrast to wish lists and similar formats used by Amazon and other mass-market retailers, which put the vast majority or all of the curation work onto customers.

This is also an avenue to push direct ecommerce sales.

Personalized recommendations, built on knowledge of what your customers own, can make online buying of accessories as well as clothes much more attractive.

With all that data available, your staff can do something algorithms still struggle with: consistently provide on-target recommendations and avoid irrelevant ones.

Both practical utility and the development of a positive emotional connection play a role in creating an effective online presence for luxury retailers.

The practicality of a closet tracker app and the role that beacons play in helping sales associates work with each customer are ultimately presented as and truly are luxury services. These unique and exciting avenues create a better understanding of a retailer's offerings and are not available from just any online storefront.

The guideline enhancing your digital efforts should be generating use cases with customers in mind, creating unique value, guiding customers to your physical stores and continuing to provide the high-class treatment shoppers expect from such brands.

When it comes to luxury brands specifically, the emotional connection is paramount, especially because customers may or may not buy items directly from a brand's online presence or physical store.

A deep understanding of the customer base is needed to create effective avenues that convey the intended emotions.

Elements that make your shoppers feel pampered, special, exclusive and valued are essential. How each brand evokes those emotions can differ greatly, based on everything from the types of products sold to the demographics of regular shoppers.

This should not be viewed as a difficulty, but a challenge for your brand to tailor its digital presence to the particularities of your customers.

WITH THE RIGHT approach and a customer-first attitude, luxury brands have plenty of opportunities to continue providing excellent, personalized service in ways that create long-term affinity and loyalty, as well as the right emotions, among their customers.



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