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3 things new luxury brands can teach established marketers

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They may have less resources, but **new luxury** brands are rethinking marketing and changing the landscape for everyone.

As a post-boomer consumer, it is a welcome shift. It is hard to be a die-hard loyalist to incumbents that demand authority and dictate the rules of luxury, when new entrants are creatively earning my trust instead. That kind of relationship, if handled correctly, can run very deep.

True, these new names are smaller, nimbler and have less to lose if a branding misstep forces them to quickly change course. And yes, brands such as Supreme and Glossier enjoy the privilege of not having to look or act or price like a stereotypical luxury brand, while still stealing affluent wallet share from luxury's big names.

But it only makes sense that in an unprecedentedly fragmented market, companies that cannot win by playing by the old rules have decided to create new ones instead.

New luxury brands take risks borne of necessity, resulting in a reimagined marketing landscape in which any company old or new can grow.

Let us take a step back from the hackneyed platitudes of going digital, creating meaningful experiences or customizing content, to explore three best practices underlying this new reality. They are best practices which anyone can adopt.

Share your "why"

Every luxury brand has made a point of telling their story a requirement especially necessary for younger audiences but typical stories of heritage can fall short. They answer the "what" of the product and "how" behind the craftsmanship, but rarely the "why" that rallies consumers around a brand's larger vision.

It is easy to look at Eckhaus Latta and see a young brand based on shock value, but that would be a gross underestimation of what lies beneath. Even though the founders resist the notion of a conscious brand identity,

saying, "[it] was never a strategic plan ... it feels more like an evolving idea," there is a clear reason why behind their work.

Mike Eckhaus and Zoe Latta's work exists because they believe true fashion comes from the critical mass of a community. That is their why, and it is woven into every single touch point and brand trigger.

From pioneering the Nodel or non-model model and nurturing a tradition of interns that go on to start their own well-received labels, to content and creative that taps a close group of highly creative friends that operate more like a sub-generation than a social circle, Eckhaus Latta constantly reinforces their "why" to achieve cult-like devotion. A consumer feels and experiences that "why" in every single touch point, every time.

It is not a mission or vision statement. It is their reason for existing, and it is a movingly honest reason that consumers are willing to buy. As Simon Sinek and many others **have pointed out**, the "why" is the bedrock for any brand because "people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it".

Your brand's "why" gives people a reason to care. It is a fine distinction that is easy to miss, but most stories are meaningless without a reason why behind them.

Get specific

A brand strategy needs to be daringly specific on two levels.

First, there is the matter of making hard decisions and drawing a line in the sand. Many brands may think they have a strategy, but are so general and risk-averse, they are not following a strategy at all.

Brand strategy is a lens through which you see the world. It is the perspective that defines your actions, processes and decisions. It is not those actions, decisions or practices in and of themselves those are tactics.

By definition it must be specific, and a good way to test specificity is to follow Roger L. Martin's **simple test** and ask, "Is the opposite of our strategy also a strategy?"

If your brand's strategy is to reach wealthy individuals with the world's finest products, you have already lost. No one else in the space will take an opposite strategy of targeting non-wealthy consumers with the world's worst products. There is not enough specificity to make this a real or meaningful perspective.

Moon Juice may be riding the celebrity wellness wave, but it knows where to play.

The brand goes after highly motivated, self-care obsessed, information-junkie millennials that want a product to work where traditional medicine may have failed, while dazzling their imagination much like K-beauty does.

Products such as "Brain Dust" for mental flow, "Beauty Dust" for luster and the "Cosmic Provision Collection" of snacks for enzymatically live eating have proven extremely popular as Moon Juice continues to grow.

Whether it is real science or health-tainment is nearly irrelevant. Moon Juice's strategy is to literally be the magic potion in a world of medicines with emphasis on the magic.

It is so specific that Moon Juice founder Amanda Chantal Bacon's products are often mocked just as much as they are obsessively consumed, which speaks to the second level of being specific saying something that gets through the noise.

This all lends itself to Ms. Bacon's narrative of self discovery and her pursuit of health. She is the embodiment of a before-and-after story, connecting her nutritional awakening to a larger narrative that says, "something happened here". In fact, this is only one of many **new narratives** emerging in modern luxury, and all of them require specificity.

Find your secret language

If you are daring enough to be specific, then you are going to tap into a secret language shared by your target consumers. Secret languages shift the perspective of your core consumer tribe while sidelining non-core users who sit outside of it.

This is not about emoji, slang or memes, although in the right situation, it can be. It is about speaking the language your customers speak to themselves in their heads.

Ritual has the many markers of a luxury brand, but applied interestingly in the vitamin space. Clean labeling, subtle and streamlined design, visually captivating, jewel-like vitamins that look like small glitter capsules, and a name that reads like a call to action send a clear luxury signal.

However, what is really compelling is its use of language for a vitamin brand.

Rather than focusing on the uses of each ingredient, Ritual uses topline descriptors such as "joy promoting," "skin perfecting," "battery charging" and "age defying" for its singular women's formula.

Ritual is carefully speaking the secret language its audience speaks to themselves. It is a language of immediate pain points, aspirations and belief about what it means to be a healthy individual.

In theory this sounds like common sense, but for larger, older brands, this can be perceived as a risk. The more specific communication is, the more narrow an audience the brand may reach.

As true as that may be, the risk is even bigger of someone else talking to your consumers in a secret language while you fail to engage them in the same way.

The fact of the matter is that the market is noisy and full of static. A brand can attempt to speak the loudest, or instead tune into the right frequency.

THE LUXURY PLAYING field has been democratized over the past 10 years, and so too has the marketing machine that drives it. There is a new appetite for deeper, more compelling brand relationships that rely on a meaningful give-and-take with the consumer.

What may look like luxury disappearing is actually luxury changing. A shift in perspective can reveal a whole new world of opportunity.

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