COLUMNS

Prepping the Web site before your next online ad campaign

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By Ryan Gellis

Advertisements for luxury fashion brands are moving off the pages of glossy magazines and into digital spaces.

The worldwide luxury business spent $1.01 billion on digital advertising in 2016, an increase of 63 percent since 2013, per media services agency Zenith Media. Over the same period, spending on magazine ads dropped 8 percent to $2.6 billion, claimed Zenith.

This shift in spending makes sense, considering how prominent online shopping has become. But, in practice, it has proved to be shortsighted.

A digital strategy is effective only if it can accommodate the traffic it generates. And in many cases, luxury brands hold on to a boutique mentality, even online.

Until they become eager and able to accommodate waves of digital shoppers, luxury brands will never fully capitalize on their online ad spend.

What does a luxury Web site look like?
Across brands and even industries, the term "luxury" can be thought of as a synonym for seamless. The term brings to mind a product that has been engineered to be as perfect as possible. It is true for suits and watches and it must be true for Web sites, too.

Consider this statistic: As many as 74 percent of online shopping carts are abandoned before checkout. This shows customers who love a product are willing to go without if they hate the experience of buying it.

A slow, confusing, broken or incomplete Web site raises red flags for consumers. It also contradicts the image of prestige and perfection that luxury brands strive to project.

Luxury brands that have not invested heavily in online commerce might misunderstand the nature of online traffic.

When a Web site is bombarded with traffic it cannot handle, it leads directly to performance issues, which then lead to lost revenue and diminished consumer confidence. It also demoralizes the members of the marketing team who

developed a great campaign that was bungled in the execution.

Preparing for success

Luxury retailers must invest just as much in their technical infrastructure as they do in their online messaging. Think of a Web site as its own type of luxury good: its performance and design should be equally impressive.

Use these strategies to ensure your Web site is ready before rolling out your next online campaign:

1. Test the functionality. Make sure the pages you link to function as intended across several popular browsers and devices.

Ensure each call to action on your site takes users to the correct landing page when clicked.

Verify the links and design of each of your pages, starting with the most important ones.

Enlisting anonymous users to test pages and links will give you a better sense of how real people will engage with your site.

2. Identify key performance indicators (KPIs). Success or failure must be measured empirically. The most important KPIs to follow are number of unique visitors, average order value and conversion rate, because they directly tell you how your marketing compares to your revenue.

Once you begin tracking these baseline metrics, you can look for patterns, track customer behavior and identify areas for ongoing improvement.

3. Implement a CRM strategy. Digital marketing is a data-driven process.

A customer relationship management solution, or CRM, serves as a central repository for all customer data and a powerful tool for adjusting a marketing strategy. This tool makes it possible to optimize your pitch and more accurately predict where and when spikes in online traffic will occur.

4. Connect with everyone. A site visitor is valuable even if she does not make a purchase. Collecting data such as email addresses, demographics or birth dates reveals volumes about who your marketing is and is not reaching.

Collecting this data also allows you to reliably reach customers with personalized offers based on location and preferences. In addition, tracking behavioral data reveals the appeal of specific products or pages.

5. Practice empathy. Never assume you know what your customers want. Make every effort to understand to which types of shopping experience, products and marketing messages your consumers actually respond.

I am a fan of user-centered data analysis and optimization, and using tools such as A/B testing, rapid prototyping and analytics can reveal actual insights that you can use to improve your product in real time.

LUXURY BRANDS cannot rely on their reputations alone to deliver success online. Instead, they must translate the luxury experience into online environments.

Making a customer feel elite is easy in a spotless storefront. Now it is time to create that same feeling on a Web site.

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