

RETAIL

Omnichannel can help deliver luxury experience

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Luxury retail should work to remove friction. Image credit: Neiman Marcus

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK Time itself is a luxury, and retailers should focus on eliminating hurdles in the purchase path.

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Amazon has set the bar high for streamlined shopping experiences, raising consumer expectations for a frictionless transaction. The "Clicks and Bricks: Why Luxury Retail Needs to Innovate" panel during Luxury FirstLook 2018: Exclusivity Redefined, speakers stressed the necessity for innovation to remove obstacles to buying.

"For me time is so much more valuable than money," said Stephan Schambach, CEO of [NewStore](#).

"If a luxury brand wastes my time, it's just not a luxury brand for me, and increasingly people think like this," he said. "So removing the friction is absolutely important."

Luxury Daily produced Luxury FirstLook 2018: Exclusivity Redefined on Jan. 17

Removing obstacles

Amazon has prioritized convenience, and in the process has conditioned consumers to one-click shopping.

[Shullman Research Center](#)'s Bob Shullman pointed out that beyond the transaction, Amazon is also poised to change the search and discovery process.

The artificial intelligent assistant Alexa is helping to usher in the rise in voice search, while Mr. Shullman also sees Amazon bringing about a rise in visual search. Much like Pinterest connects visual discovery with buying, he foresees Amazon owning this with its video-enabled Echo devices.



Search is poised to expand further beyond text. Image credit: Amazon

Amazon has also spread itself into the content game. For instance, Mot Hennessy USA developed a "Bottles and Bubbles" skill for Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa to educate consumers about Champagne at home ([see story](#)).

NewStore's Mr. Schambach noted how tedious some of the checkout processes at luxury stores can be, as they require manual input of information. He sees the potential for digital payment methods that do not require the consumer to provide credit card data or remember passwords.

While digital can be a tool for easing the retail process, it can also provide brands with an opportunity to provide service. For instance, data allows brands to better know their top clients, even if they are shopping in different channels or store locations.

Mitchell Stores' chairman Jack Mitchell attributes part of its success to its personal touch. Leveraging data gleaned from interactions and transactions, Mitchell Stores is able to determine potential targets for particular vendors and customize the shopping experience.

The family-owned retailer also focuses on its employees. Many of its associates and tailors have remained with the company for decades, allowing for a consistency of service for long-term clients.



Mitchell Stores. Image credit: Mitchell Stores

As brands reach out to their clients, **King & Partners'** cofounder and creative director Inii Kim noted that many miss out by not using their messaging to drive store traffic, choosing instead to focus on ecommerce. She also suggested that brands give their sales associates or frontline staff the ability to communicate digitally with customers to get them in the door.

Amazon inspired

The patent held by Amazon for its 1-click payment technology expired Sept. 11, meaning other online retailers can begin implementing similar convenient checkout systems into their own digital marketplaces.

For luxury brands looking to take advantage of the growing hunger for ecommerce, 1-click purchasing should be an interesting prospect. The technology allows customers to quickly make purchases without having to go through

complicated forms and confirmations, leading to a smoother online shopping experience ([see story](#)).

Mr. Schambach noted that while luxury brands might not be able to or want to achieve Amazon's "vending machine" style experience, they should consider how to provide a similarly easy process that is also on-brand.

Even with the rise in digital, the panel does not see digital replacing the in-store experience.

Rather than focusing on the cool factor behind in-store technology, retailers should prioritize touchpoints that streamline the purchase path to build loyalty, according to new data from SOTI.

About two-thirds of consumers would rather use self-service technology than interact with a sales associate. While luxury retail is centered on a high-touch atmosphere, consumer tastes are evolving, and SOTI's report hints at a future where a high-tech environment is more sought-after by shoppers ([see story](#)).

"The Amazon experience in most respects relates to the customer's perceptions of convenience," Mr. Shullman said. "They offer virtually everything and they in most respects are a one click experience.

"What they have done and one of the reasons they've been successful is Jeff Bezos has focused on eliminating the annoyances and problems consumers have with shopping," he said.

"They're upping the game to get other people to at some point match them."

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