LUXURY MEMO SPECIAL REPORTS

Photography in luxury – Luxury Memo special report

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Inside the Shanghai Center of Photography

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Miu Miu Room 303 campaign

Photography for luxury brands was traditionally a well-crafted art used to shoot the highest quality images for advertising campaigns and catalog spreads. But with the influence of online, the imagery used by many brands today is quick, fun and informative, aiming to appeal to the smartphone user.

The trend toward the everyday use of photography has allowed brands to have a more personal experience with their consumers and enthusiasts. However, despite this trend, luxury labels have held steadfast to photography as a form of art through books, exhibits and experiences that connect brands, consumers and art beyond smartphones and social media.

"Social media channels have evolved to be very visual platforms," said Pau Sabria, co-founder and CEO of Olapic, New York. "Some platforms, like Instagram, completely revolve around photography. Others, like Facebook and Twitter, don't require visuals, but brands and individuals alike experience more engagement in their posts when images are included with them."

Top 5 trends in photography

- Social Media

  The smartphone has made everyone an amateur photographer and has allowed for a constant stream of photographs to be released by brands, changing the ways in which marketers showcase products to consumers.

- Print

  While the magazine photo spread has not completely died, brands are looking elsewhere to demonstrate their artistic sides. Photo books that portray a given house over extended periods of time and exhibits that allow a brand to align with a renowned artist have brought printed photographs to new realms.

- Photography influencing brands

  Art has long been synonymous with luxury, so it is unsurprising that luxury brands find inspiration and alliance with photographers and their works.

- Brands influencing photography

  It is common for famous photographers to team with brands for a photo series, exhibit or book. Also, with social media, brands are constantly engaging with their followers through photography.

- The amateur photographer's role

  Carefully curated photography of a model in a studio with a day-long shoot for the best image is fading as brands are expected to have content on a consistent basis. Therefore, bloggers, social media influencers, creative directors or the countless other individuals brands work with are filling their Instagram pages with personal photography, offering consumers a more day-to-day glimpse at their favorite companies.

Print photography still exists

Although the studio crafted, model-filled photography is not the most prevalent, photography for print is still in existence. Magazines have advertisement spreads, while brands still launch billboards and photography books.

Miu Miu combined the new with the old in photography by using the concept of casual photo shoots among friends to craft a professionally shot advertisement campaign. The fall 2017 campaign, titled "Room 303," was photographed by Alasdair McLellan and features a cast of women shown preparing for a night out on the town.

The Room 303 campaign tells a female friendship narrative in a series of still images that are coy, relaxed and physical. Miu Miu used a London hotel room as the setting for the "spur-of-the-moment photo session" (see story).


Room 303 photography campaign

Besides advertising campaigns, many brands have compiled photography books to showcase various parts of their stories through print.

Louis Vuitton created a travel photography book series to merge its fashion and travel passions. In each edition of Fashion Eye, a photographer's work in a particular city is explored.

For example, one book explores Monte Carlo through the lens of photographer Helmut Newton. Mr. Newton relocated to Monte Carlo from Paris in 1981, living in the principality until his death in 2004 (see story).
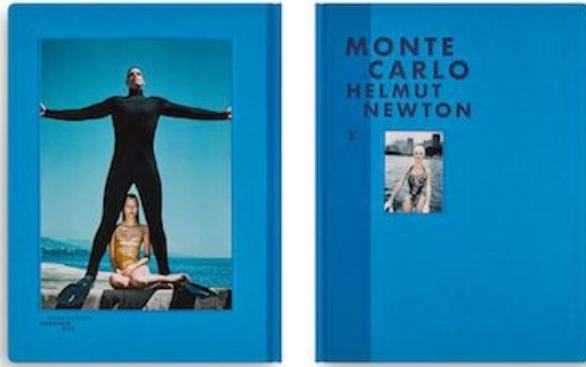
Louis Vuitton Fashion Eye: Monte Carlo Helmut Newton. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

Bentley Motors created a book, published by Assouline, entitled "Be Extraordinary: The Spirit of Bentley." Penned by Parisian photographer Aline Coquelle, the tome tells the history of the nearly 100-year-old automaker.

Considered "the most-definitive British luxury car company," Bentley was founded in 1919 by Walter Owen Bentley in Cricklewood, North London (see story).

Other brands have taken the new social media trends and brought them to photography books.

Marc Jacobs crafted a book focused on the designer's Instagram-famous pup Neville's photogenic qualities. Written by Nicolas Newbold, Neville's studio manager, "Neville Jacobs: I'm Marc's Dog" compiles pictures that show the pet's glamorous lifestyle, whether partying with models or hanging out with his owner at the Marc Jacobs studio (see story).

Neville Jacobs posing with his book. Image credit: Marc Jacobs

Art is synonymous with luxury and the ultra-wealthy, and combining with a known photographer allows a brand to present itself as a piece of art. For example, Scottish distiller The Macallan paired with Steven Klein to release a limited-edition Scotch whisky and never-before-seen imagery taken by the photographer.

Since 2008, The Macallan has partnered with well-known photographers for its Masters of Photography series that include a limited-edition Scotch and a display of the selected photographer's work. The Macallan Masters of Photography's partnership with Mr. Klein marked the spirit maker's sixth utterance of the project (see story).

The Macallan Masters of Photography: Steven Klein imagery

Dior chose to align not only with art, but with social justice issues. The French fashion house put a feminine lens on its spring/summer 2017 ready-to-wear collection to mark the milestone of its first female artistic director's debut. #TheWomenBehindTheLens gave nine photographers carte blanche to shoot the season's fashions in their own way (see story).

[embed]https://www.instagram.com/p/BR5tXCSgx-R/?
utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=embed_ufi_test[/embed]

Experiencing photography

The switch in photography to a more everyday task has allowed anyone to be a photographer. Brands have given the power to the consumers to both become photographers and appreciate photography.

Swedish camera manufacturer Hasselblad showcased how brands work closely with art happenings to better align themselves with affluent consumers' interest through a photography experience. Experienced photographers, as well as beginners, were able to experience a series of workshops from Hasselblad that blended its brand with art (see story).

Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, HI also tapped into consumers' curiosity with photography in its Maui Photo Expedition workshop. The event took place at the resort and gave participants a chance to interact with and learn from professionals in the field.

The workshop featured on-location shoots, instruction demonstrations, group editing and critique sessions to help improve compositional and editing skills. Scenic Maui, with its bamboo forests, sandy beaches and gorgeous light, made a perfect host for the workshop (see story).

Maui bamboo forest

Rather than building experiences around consumers physically photographing, some brands chose to give them the chance to enjoy the visual art of photography. High-net-worth individuals are often connoisseurs of art, frequently aligning luxury with the craft and seeking new experiences within the field, and luxury brands are apt to provide these experiences.

Gucci brought the art experience to consumer when it translated creative director Alessandro Michele's A Magazine Curated By issue to a new medium through a trio of exhibitions. The traveling exhibit visited Hong Kong, Beijing and Taipei, with each exhibition dedicated to the work of one female photographer (see story).

Bottega Veneta also collaborated with art through an alliance with the Shanghai Center of Photography.

From the start of 2017, the brand was the corporate sponsor of the institution, sponsoring four international exhibits throughout the year. The first of the Bottega Veneta-sponsored series was "Made in Germany: German Photography from the 19th Century to Today." Up from Jan. 11 to April 2, this exhibit featured works by Helmut Newton and Leopold Ahrendts, with works spanning genres from Bahaus to documentary (see story).

Karl Lagerfeld chose to align his brands with luxury through his own work with two retrospective photography exhibits. Organized by the Alliance Franaise, the "Obra en Proceso/Work in Progress" exhibition was a monthlong celebration of Francophone culture in Cuba. The display featured 200 photographs grouped by subject: fashion, architecture and landscapes. All works were taken by Mr. Lagerfeld and underscore his use of different camera types and printing techniques (see story).

High quality images can help introduce customers to products and complete the purchase. Image credit: Karl Lagerfeld

Mr. Lagerfeld is known for his photography skills, but other fashion houses have chosen to have photography honor their faces behind-the-scenes. Lanvin's former artistic director Alber Elbaz was presented as the actual subject at a photography exhibit in Paris.

Frdric Malle and Alber Elbaz

In the digital age, Mr. Elbaz stood out as unique at the time as the designer did not have an email address, did not use social networks and tasked out to others the documentation of his work through photography or film. The photography exhibit, housed at Paris' Maison Europeene de la Photographie, showcased Mr. Elbaz's career at Lanvin (see story).

These brands have chosen to exhibit themselves amongst the artwork of others, but some brand exhibits remain so

close to the heart of the brand, they are presented in-store.

For example, Aston Martin supported its mission to branch out as a lifestyle brand rather than just automotive marque with an in-store exhibit celebrating the work of an acclaimed photographer.

Aston Martin's "Mark Shaw: A Moment in Time" commemorated the work of the late photographer by displaying his art from the 1950s, featuring photographs of fashion and celebrities. The exhibit opened at Aston Martin's experimental boutique, No. 8 Dover Street in London, following the city's Fashion Week (see story).

Courtyard Givenchy Rust Cape Copyright Mark Shaw courtesy of Aston Martin

Smythson similarly hosted an exclusive in-store art exhibition to pay homage to "Strong Women."

Behind-the-scenes image of Daphne Selfe and Alistair Guy

At its New Bond Street store in London, the brand presented the intimate portraiture of its friend Alistair Guy, which depicts famous figures in fashion, music and film (see story).

Art becomes instant
Social media has uprooted most industries, changing the ways in which consumers can be reached in terms of content, time and interaction.

The push to include the consumer in campaigns has been around for years, but social media allows the inclusion to be immediate and personal. Luxury brands are now able to take the common concept of a photography series and bring it to social media so everyone can enjoy the art.

Salvatore Ferragamo not only brought its photo series to social media, but it also chose a non-traditional photographer for the event. Kicking off #AmoFerragamo, the brand teamed up with blogger Nicole Warne, known more commonly as Gary Pepper Girl, to capture its fall/winter 2017 shoe collection, the first design by newly installed women's footwear design director Paul Andrew.

[embed]https://www.instagram.com/p/BUcJPAvgpOP/?
utm_source=ig_embed&utm_campaign=embed_profile_upsell_test[/embed]

Ferragamo's Instagram post

Ferragamo casts professional models for official advertising campaigns, but often incorporates personalities ranging from art world insiders to influencers for its digital initiatives (see story).

Oficine Panerai also brought a photography series to a social media campaign. The brand's Paneraitrats campaign, broken up into chapters on the brand's Instagram page, followed multiple photographers and lovers of design and

imagery as they spoke about the ways that images and photography intersect with the world of fine watches. In doing so, Panerai elevated the status of its watches from mere objects to works of art (see story).

Panerai uses photography to enhance the appeal of its watches. Image credit: Oficine Panerai

La Prairie also chose professional photographers to post on its Instagram feed. The brand celebrated the launch of its new product, White Caviar Illuminating Pearl Ingusion, with an Instagram takeover from six Swiss artists.

La Prairie's White caviar product

The artists controlled the brand's social media page, showcasing their own works that La Prairie felt were an artistic reflection of the aesthetic the new product is going for. In addition to promoting the brand, La Prairie wanted to highlight the art and artists of its home country (see story).

In 2017, Longchamp opened four new flagship stores and created an Instagram campaign, themed as if it were a photo travel diary, to mark each opening. The #CollectingParisianMemories effort helped Longchamp share its brand happenings in an interesting format that told about its new boutique as well as the store location's link to Paris.

To promote the opening, #CollectingParisianMemories starts off with an exterior photo of the Longchamp flagship.

[embed]https://www.instagram.com/p/BSL1_uLgpu5/?utm_source=ig_embed[/embed]

Longchamp Instagram post

The effort continued with a tour of Paris, but with a Russian heritage focus. Tying together French and Russian heritage allows Longchamp to contextualize why a Parisian label would fit right in in Moscow.

Longchamp was joined by Russian socialite and model Lena Perminova, who was shown on a tour of Paris from the sidecar of a Russian motorcycle. #CollectingParisianMemories showed Ms. Perminova in Longchamp apparel and accessories and highlighted Russian cuisine, craft, culture and architecture found around Paris (see story).

"With the tipping point having been reached in print and traditional media falling through the floor, brands are at a complete loss on how to reach their audience," said Robin Derrick, executive creative director of advertising agency Spring Studios. "Even high-end luxury brands are reaching to influencer campaigns that look increasingly like bought media, and this is not a long-term solution."

Much more than photos

Visual social media platforms have pulled ahead of Twitter in luxury brand adoption and user bases (see story).

Instagram offers luxury brands the opportunity to speak to a growing, global audience of 500 million daily users, who are turning to the platform to explore their passions, whether fashion or travel. Instagram has become the fastest growing mobile application, and today it counts 800 million active monthly users, 80 percent of whom are living outside of the United States.

The social media platform has outpaced magazines as the source of consumers' inspiration, with U.S. consumers more apt to look at Instagram than glossies to find ideas, according to a Facebook-sponsored study by Kantar Millward Brown. Stories, which debuted in 2016, currently has 250 million users either creating or consuming these pieces of disappearing content every day.

Brands have embraced this feature, with 50 percent of businesses having posted a Story in the last month. One-third of the most viewed stories come from brands (see story).

Recently, brands have been using Instagram as a chance to connect with audiences through different social influencers. For example, Bally recruited some prominent American social media influencers to introduce its new flagship store on Madison Avenue in New York.

Bally utilizes social influencers

On Instagram, the brand recruited three prominent influencers for a video and photo shoot showing them walking the streets of New York on their way to the new location. Along the way, they showed off different luxury goods and accessories that can be purchased at Bally (see story).

"One of the most important trends for luxury brands is the use of influencers," Olapic's Mr. Sabria said. "Influencers are people with followingsoften through social media platforms, like Instagramthat trust the recommendations they make around products and services.

"Sometimes influencers are celebrities with large fan bases, but often they are regular people with more modest followings," he said. "The key is, however, that the influencers understand what their followers are looking for, and know how to communicate with them.

"We recently conducted a study about influencers and found that 31 percent of respondents in the U.S., U.K., France and Germany have purchased a product or service after seeing it in an influencer's post. Furthermore, 43 percent of respondents cited authenticity as the main reason to trust influencers, and 66 percent said that influencer content must be relevant to their interests.

"These results demonstrate that influencers can be a powerful part of a marketing strategy."

Brands can also use Instagram to present user-generated content. This type of campaign can be implemented by various different brands, as seen with Flexjet's take on sharing a traditional influencer campaign that looks to consumers for new travel innovations.

[embed]https://www.instagram.com/p/BgWBS3yHiPC/?utm_source=ig_embed[/embed]

Ken Ricci's Instagram post

While Instagram campaigns are rampant with influencer partnerships, especially in the travel sector, Flexjet's campaign was a refreshing new take. The company's chairman, Kenn Ricci, who is widely popular on Instagram for

his travel photography, is giving his followers the spotlight in this campaign. Mr. Ricci's followers shared their ideas for an unparalleled trip that he can test out and share on his account.

Flexjet will decide two winners based on the quality of their ideas. The winning user will then be offered a chance to travel to the resort on the Baja California peninsula in Mexico via private jet (see story).

"We've seen across a number of industries, including luxury, that images of consumers wearing or using products are often more effective in creating engagement and interest than brands posting the visuals and imagery they create themselves," said Mr. Sabria.

"People really value the authenticity of seeing their friends using products and trust their recommendations more than they do a traditional advertisement in many cases," he said. "This user-generated content (UGC) creates a sort of validation in the minds of people considering a purchase. So UGC-based visual marketing has become a much more important part of marketing strategies for many brands, luxury brands included."

Flexjet's campaign is refreshing on Instagram currently, but a few years ago, user-generated content was a very common trend by luxury brands.

Currently, Instagram is one of the most attractive social media platforms for luxury brands with the introduction of collection advertisements.

This new ad format blends advertising, social media and commerce by letting brands add a collection of viewable products to an Instagram ad that customers can then purchase without leaving the app. The feature represents Instagram's continued drive to lure in more brands and retailers to its platform (see story).

In addition, although Instagram Stories ads have been available for some time, they have normally been restricted to a single interstitial slide. Now, thanks to some internal changes to how the system works, Instagram will allow brands to advertise using its Carousel ad format, allowing them multiple slides of content, including photos and videos (see story).

Chanel chose to mix the advertising side of Instagram with user engagement by painting its Coco Mademoiselle fragrance in a mysterious light through an interactive campaign that resembled a scavenger hunt.
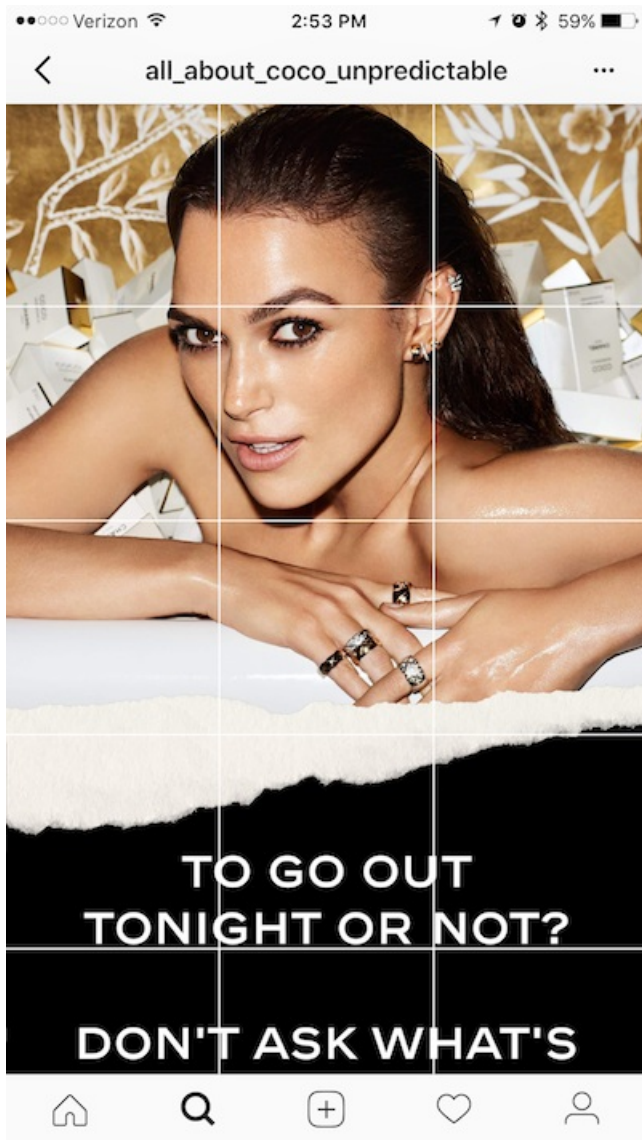
Chanel's image on Instagram

Chanel's official Instagram account shared an image for its Coco Mademoiselle campaign that is comprised of three different ad photographs in an effort to be mysterious. Fans clicked the tags to see the full images revealed and discover the different facets of Coco Mademoiselle (see story).

Snap a photo

Instagram's increasingly large share of social advertising has placed Snapchat is in a rough position right now and is causing the platform to reinvent some of its longstanding traditions.

For one, Snapchat is testing unskippable advertisements, something that has never appeared on the platform before, as well as moving content so that it is not exclusive to the application. As luxury brands and influencers increasingly move to Instagram, Snapchat is left to figure out how to keep advertisers without alienating users (see story).
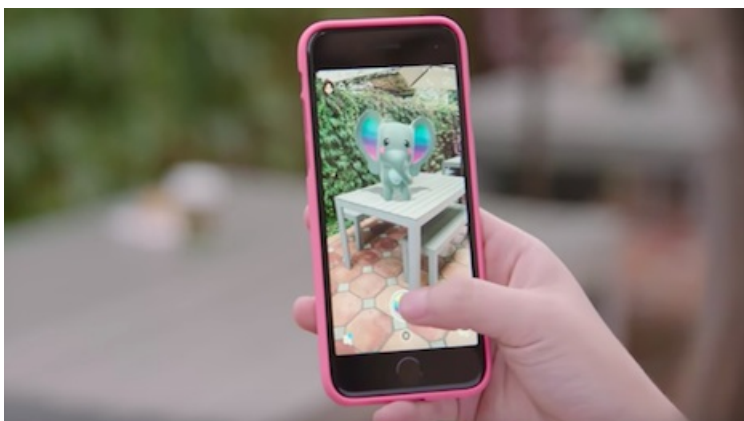
Snapchat's Lens Studio was another bid to bring in more advertisers. Image credit: Snap

A recently launched Snapchat offering is opening the door for advertisers to have greater interaction and call-to-action strategies on user-generated content.

Snapchat invested another inventive advertising strategy that offers more information to consumers while benefiting marketers. Snapchat's newly launched Context Cards feature allows users to swipe up for more information regarding a snap, powered by advertisers such as TripAdvisor, Foursquare, Michelin and Goop.

[embed]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kn4KUvDzQFg[/embed]

Snapchat | Introducing Context Cards

Opportunities for luxury retailers and travel brands are vast with Snapchat's new Context Cards. The mutual benefits for consumers and advertisers make this a useful tool. The more helpful or entertaining an advertising tool is for consumers, the better it is for marketers, as this provides a positive reaction while also creating a seamless path to spend (see story).

Snapchat has taken on a surprising new element of its business model with the addition of a new ecommerce push.

In the wake of controversial changes from a new user interface update and a small but significant exodus of influencers, Snapchat has made the surprising turn to ecommerce with the drop of Nike's Air Jordans through the platform. If this is a route that Snapchat continues down, it may see more influence from the luxury world as well.

Piling onto its ongoing competition with Instagram, which has successfully co-opted Snapchat's Stories features, Snapchat also recently rolled out a big redesign to the application, which was met with a less than stellar reaction.

After users revolted and created a massive petition to reverse the update, which became so large that Snapchat was forced to respond. One of the main criticisms was that it strained the relationship between users and influencers on Snapchat.

Snapchat users could buy the new Air Jordans directly through the app. Image credit: Nike

But it seems that Snapchat may be moving away from advertising as a business model in favor of mobile commerce (see story).

The changes in Snapchat has led brands to feel slightly more confident in the longevity of the application, producing campaigns for its users.

This was seen when the Paris government supported its plan to become a digital-first city with the social application during its fashion week.

Paris Fashion Week was supported by a series of Snapchat filters created in partnership with digital agency IRM. The campaign was a part of the city's project to become more of a "startup" culture to attract more young travelers and individuals (see story).

The photography element Snapchat campaigns elicit allows consumers to interact with brands without having to post a photo on their own social media feeds. Being able to snap a photo with a branded filter and share it with a select amount of friends can be more appealing than branded hashtag campaigns.

Best practices for photography in marketing

- Pau Sabria, Olapic
  - "The first best practice is to have a strategy that goes beyond using just brand-creating imagery and visuals in marketing. That sort of imagery certainly has a place, but luxury brands should also embrace the visuals and imagery their customers are creating and develop a strategy around how to curate it, get permission to use it and activate it on their channels whether those channels are social media, ecommerce, advertising, Web sites, apps or in-store."
  - "Once activated, the brands should analyze why the images are resonating with customers. Look at what products are being shown, the settings where the UGC is created (at the beach, at a garden party, in a home, etc.), what is in the background, how the person in the image is displaying the item look at all of it. Brands may even want to consider a technology solution that can help with not only analyzing the images but also managing them across the marketing eco-system."
  - "A third best practice is to go a step further and develop a strategy for using influencers. Luxury brands should work to identify the ones who are already reaching their key audiences, learn why their followings trust the influencer's recommendations and look at the engagement that is happening from the influencer's posts. Consider putting a formal program and platform in place to employ influencers and manage their content."
  - "A bonus best practice is to not stop at photography. Integrate video into the mix, too. Video content has proven to be effective in both engagement and revenue-driving campaigns. While traditionally it's been expensive and time-consuming to produce, there are solutions available that can take existing visuals imagery and videos and turn them into short-form pieces that can be activated across channels."
- Robin Derrick, Spring Studios
  - "The need now is for always on' content brands, including luxury brands, need a wealth of content and imagery to attract customers pretty much every day while maintaining quality and brand image."
  - "Don't rely on pictures of product only."
  - "Tell a rich brand story."
  - "Quality is still important."