

Q&A

Price no longer major factor in how consumers define luxury: Souler cofounder

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Andrea Tobin is cofounder of Souler

By **Marie Driscoll**

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*A true renaissance woman, Andrea Tobin is entrepreneur, designer and startup expert. She is the founder/designer of fashion handbag brand **Marla Cielo**, and is cofounder of two retail-tech startups, **RevCascade**, a marketplace automation platform, and now **Souler**, an influencer marketplace for brands and influencers.*

*With influencers accounting for 10 percent of decisions about luxury purchases per a Boston Consulting Group study with Italian luxury trade group Altagamma and with this lever expected to grow, **Driscoll Advisors** principal Marie Driscoll goes to the source and speaks with Ms. Tobin about this expanding new media and marketplace. Here is the entire interview:*

What is Souler?

Souler is a platform where brand influencers can launch, operate, scale and profit from their own ecommerce stores on a turnkey, no-cost basis.

Influencers are able to sell the products they love from the brands they represent directly to consumers on Souler, without having to manage physical inventory or deal with the complexities of running their own ecommerce site, such as processing orders and managing customer service.

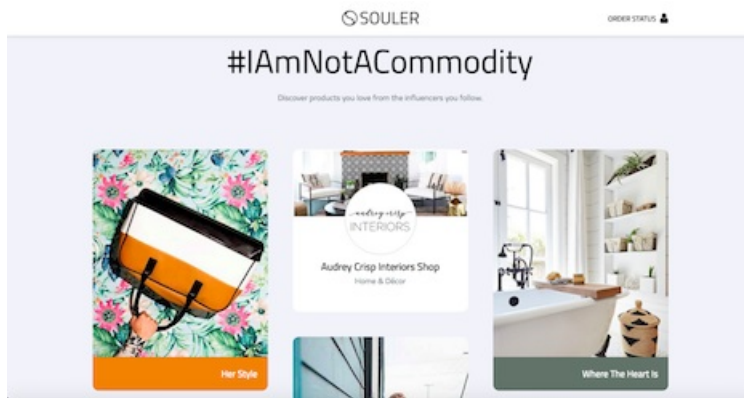
It started as a project focused on the rise of influencers, who have become a driving force in digital marketing.

We saw a white-space opportunity to give influencers free tools to become ecommerce retailers.

Influencers are great visual storytellers and impact close to 50 percent of all purchasing decisions, and that combination is perfectly suited for ecommerce.

Shoppers can follow their favorite influencers on Souler and purchase the products posted directly through the influencers' stores on the site.

One exciting aspect of Souler is that it gives consumers the ability to curate their own highly personalized shopping experience by following particular influencers on the platform.



Heart and soul of it

What benefits does a marketplace provide for luxury brands?

The Farfetch fashion platform has proven just how much shoppers love to buy luxury goods online.

Souler enables luxury brands to work more closely with their influencers, extending their relationship beyond sponsored posts to include ecommerce.

Every influencer campaign can deliver tangible sales via Souler, while also deepening the connections among the brands, the influencer and shoppers.

Luxury brands think of Souler as another consumer touch point that leverages the power of visual storytelling.

Consumers already respond positively to influencers' luxury brand posts on social media, and brand awareness plus actual sales is a great combination.

Last but not least, luxury brands love the fact that Souler is a full-price platform that enables them to remain in complete control of their pricing and product offerings and which influencers they work with.

How important are influencers in selling luxury products?

Influencers are extremely important in selling luxury products because they are the ultimate visual storytellers and because consumers find them so authentic and trustworthy.

Luxury brands have been partnering with influencers for years to establish deeper consumer connections and build brand awareness that gives depth and meaning to their brand and products. Souler enables them to extend their collaboration with influencers to generate a new revenue stream, too.

Influencers' reach across every consumer segment is undeniable.

Search any topic on YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook or Google, and you'll find an influencer who can deliver expertise. This applies to luxury products even more than commodity products, as commodity purchases are more often driven by price, while luxury product purchases are more often tied to emotion.

In fact, a recent [study](#) showed how personal psychology, brand association and even fleeting moods or feelings can affect a consumer's desire to purchase luxury products.

The Internet has made brands, including Marla Cielo, more mainstream and widely accessible to consumers. It has given luxury brands the opportunity to reach millions of new consumers and tell their brand story in new ways, including through influencers, whose inherent credibility as authentic, third-party experts reinforces the brand message.

Souler started earlier this year. What are the early learnings?

Where do we begin? We are learning every day and creating new tools based on that new knowledge.

We've learned that brands are craving new platforms that they can market and sell through and use to develop deeper connections with shoppers.

Meanwhile, influencers need places to tell their audience about the products they love and why they love them. They also need ways to showcase their creativity and merchandising prowess, because they are expert curators. That's why consumers trust them.

How do luxury shoppers find Souler?

Luxury shoppers will find Souler through the influencers they follow and connect with. They may read about Souler or see it mentioned on blogs, but their impetus to go to Souler.com will be because influencers they trust talk about products and brands they have live in their store.

We've signed a number of luxury brands in the home decor, lifestyle and kids categories, such as Grey New York Grey New England, Maud Helene and Mada Luxe. We're in stealth mode with a few. We are onboarding new brands and new products daily.

How have trends in luxury affected how consumers shop?

Consumers now feel the need to be included in the brand's dialogue and product story and they are gravitating to brands that do this well.

Today's luxury consumer is looking for a unique experience. They want to find products in an environment that isn't replicated anywhere else, whether they are shopping online or in store.

Today's luxury consumer really wants to be part of a community and a story they can connect with.

Describe today's luxury consumer and how are they different now versus 20 years ago?

Today's luxury consumer is more interested in the product itself, and how that product fits in to the consumer's life or provides him or her with something of value.

Because today's luxury consumers have easy access to unprecedented amounts of information, they have more control over what they want and will only engage with brands that mean something to them, often times because the brand has effectively communicated its commitment to authenticity.

Today, price is no longer a major factor in how consumers define luxury.

This is in stark contrast to luxury consumers 20 years ago who were more interested in simply acquiring a product because it was perceived to be expensive or exclusive.

Today, consumers are savvy enough to really understand what exclusivity means and whether a brand is being true to their story and values.

A brand like Marla Cielo is a good example of today's luxury because the brand has authenticity combined with a rich product story.

Platforms like Souler give brands like Marla Cielo an authentic voice and connection to influencers, who can in turn communicate the essence of the brand to their followers.

What role do influencers play in ecommerce today and how does this impact luxury brands?

Consumers no longer rely exclusively on traditional media and retailers to learn about trends.

Instead, they increasingly look to influencers and social media to learn about culture and what brands and trends to follow.

According to a Twitter/Analect survey, 49 percent of people polled rely on recommendations from influencers when making purchasing decisions, and 40 percent said that they've purchased an item online after seeing it used by an influencer on Instagram, Twitter or YouTube. This trend is even more important in the luxury space.

Luxury brands need new ways to tell their product story to engage more deeply with their customers.



Marie Driscoll is principal of Driscoll Advisors

Marie Driscoll is principal of Driscoll Advisors, New York. Reach her at marietdriscoll@gmail.com.

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