

COLUMNS

## Luxury brands must start investing in Gen Z now

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*Marc Jacobs Daisy campaign featuring Gen Z ambassadors*

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While Generation Z is just starting to come of age, their strong influence over cultural touch points has already made a significant impact.

As their wallets start to catch up to the magnitude of their influence, luxury brands need to pay attention and invest in this demographic now.

Like generations before them, Gen Z associates luxury brands with a certain lifestyle.

Whereas Generation X saw flash, and Generation Y or millennials saw fame, Gen Z sees form.

Conformity is not a hallmark of Gen Z.

With this generation, they appreciate that luxury fashions are a means to experience uniqueness, to feel special, and set themselves apart.

Luxury brands have the unique opportunity to connect with Gen Z now and ways to cultivate relationships that will lead to longer-lasting brand loyalty.

Find the gateways

There are two major gateways for Gen Z: beauty and social media.

Luxury brands know that beauty is the go-to for anyone wanting to own a piece of luxury. But for Gen Z, specifically, it offers the gateway to a longer-lasting relationship and helps increase their loyalty to luxury brands.

Gen Z's influence across trends and their household spending power is large, but their own personal wallets have not quite caught up yet.

Beauty offers a smaller and more affordable dose of luxury as they explore more options.

Whether it is fragrance or lipstick, beauty items still offer the spirit and aesthetic that Gen Z loves about a brand.

Additionally, Gen Z is Instagramming their new beauty purchases, providing reviews and appreciating the packaging.

Just like their favorite influencers, this audience examines the details that go into each item.

The types of beauty products they gravitate toward now will influence the larger price point items that they will embrace as they mature.

The second gateway is social media.

Social media is the focal point of conversion.

According to the 2017 Sweetie High Beauty Insights Survey, 73 percent of Gen Z say that the people they follow on social media most often influence their beauty-purchase decisions.

Gen Z turns to social media for guidance and discovery of these products.

The survey also found that more than half of Gen Z girls look to social media for what they buy, brands and trends.

Since Gen Z spends the majority of their time behind screens, social media has become the epicenter of their creative discovery.

Brands need to ensure that they are present and interacting often.

Luxury brands are incredibly visual, so ensure that images are specific, stylized and engaging relative to the platform on which they are. These posts will be the beginning touch points of engagement and conversations.

Emphasize quality and craft

Unlike their millennial counterparts, Gen Z by nature has a greater appreciation for quality.

Seeing the challenges and downsides to fast-fashion, Gen Z has grown to appreciate quality products and are mindful of products that have a history.

Luxury brands inherently have a heritage that cannot be replicated by ecommerce or fast-fashion. That heritage, along with their personal story, craftsmanship and uniqueness, appeals to Gen Z and helps them overcome barriers to entry into the consumer space.

This generation is also more cognizant of sustainability. They understand that great quality and craftsmanship can be a signature part of the wardrobe and will look to superior-made pieces that last longer.

Weave influencers into the narrative

Given the emphasis on brand narrative and quality, luxury brands are more predisposed to being careful with their partnerships and voice. This actually lends itself to a more thoughtful marketing approach toward whom they engage with, and this approach often resonates with Gen Z more.

Since luxury brands have held longer-term relationships than broader retailers and brands, they are very careful in their selection of partners, especially relating to influencers.

Whether it is Bella Hadid or Suki Waterhouse, major fashion houses have teamed up with famous names who have large followings and whose voices align with both their backgrounds and their targeted audiences.

Brands just need to be careful with whom they engage and how that influencer interacts with consumers.

It is important that influencers engage in a way that is not a one-off, but in a longer-term collaboration because that will naturally bring about a more authentic voice and content.

Gen Z craves authenticity and immediately recognizes when an influencer is genuinely engaged with a brand.

Create unique, engaging experiences

It is not enough for Gen Z to covet items on Instagram. It is important that brands create unique experiences that give girls the chance to interact, to feel special, and increase their social currency.

This approach not only allows future brand loyalists to enjoy an immersive experience with the brand, it also allows additional content creation.

Once engaged, these young consumers will share that content and help the brand reach even more audiences in a viral ripple effect.

Luxury and beauty brands have taken to this approach through in-store events, even in the fashion space, with luxury brands placing a strong emphasis on creating relationships with consumers.

Experiential events amplify this opportunity and offer brands the opportunity create memories for consumers and build new relationships with them, compared to the momentary swipe or click of a transaction.

Brands should engage with girls at a young age to create a relationship and memories with their product. This initial relationship will instill loyalty and create additional opportunities.

NOW IS THE best time for luxury brands to begin a promising relationship with Gen Z.

Because of their longer history and heritage, luxury brands have taken the "tortoise, not the hare" approach.

Being slower-moving and protecting their creative means that luxury brands can build an allure and essence of quality that speaks to Gen Z.

Gen Z is not influenced by the mega celebs, but by brands and people with unique and specific voices.

Make sure that your brand is using that voice to resonate with Gen Z, and you will retain that loyalty for decades to come.



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