

LUXURY MEMO SPECIAL REPORTS

Catalogs – Luxury Memo special report

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Catalogs may be unnecessary, but they can still hold a place in today's retail world. Image credit: Nordstrom

By DANNY PARISI

Before the rise of ecommerce, it was common to browse through seasonal catalogs, marveling at the contents contained therein. Now in the age of the Internet, do catalogs still have a place in the retail world?

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Today, customers can get every bit of information they could ever need about inventory and products with a few button presses on their phones or computers, through online searches and store Web sites, and they can discover new products via their social media feeds. Nonetheless there may still be a place in retail for catalogs, particularly as luxury brands seek ways to make shopping with them feel more unique, more immediate and more premier than everyday shopping with more mass retailers.

"Most catalog shopping interactions happen online, however, people enjoy holding a catalog and perusing what's out there from their seat, on the beach, no laptop, no work," said Amy Romero, chief marketing officer of [CreativeDrive](#), New York. "They put it down and pick it up again a day later, and it often stays in the house for weeks.

"However, in today's modern world, catalogs can and should evolve," she said. "Retailers can use AR apps to scan a product image from a catalog so a shopper can 'bring' it into their home and see how it looks before going online or to a store to make the purchase."

Top 5 trends in catalogs:

- The decline of print media

One of the major challenges facing catalogs today is the general fact that customers just do not tend to read print media nearly as much. Overall print media spend is down across all sectors, replaced mainly by digital. If customers are unlikely to peruse a magazine with insightful editorial content, why would they be interested in a print magazine that is solely dedicated to products?

- Digital replacing catalogs

In many ways, the purposes that catalogs once served have been completely disseminated into the general digital world. If customers want to know what products will soon be available at a store, including prices and sizing, or to see what products look like in action, all they need to do is fire up their phones and go to the

brand's Web page or social media feed.

- Magalogs

Some brands have taken to creating "magalogs," or print publications that combine the essences of a magazine and a catalog. In these hybrid publications, consumers can browse new products in high quality photography while also getting some quality content in the form of editorials, interviews and articles.

- Catalog supplements

In an effort to make print catalogs more appealing, some brands have begun to position those books as supplements or companion pieces to digital campaigns. A combined effort allows the resources created for a catalog, such as photography, to do double duty, reaching even those who will not read the physical catalog.

- Influencers as the new catalogs

Digital influencers are one of the most engaging ways that brands can connect with consumers today. As customers increasingly spread their attention across channels and lose some of the brand loyalty that characterized shopping habits of previous years, influencers have become one of the ways that customers discover new products and see what they look like in action.

Do catalogs still matter?

The most pressing question when it comes to catalogs is: do they still matter?

In today's retail landscape, customers can find information about products and inventory in any number of ways through digital means.

For example, U.S. menswear label John Varvatos is bridging the gap between offline and online through a new platform as consumers look to mobile search for local products.

Radius8, Inc. is partnering with the menswear brand to bring its local products to its ecommerce platform. Shoppers will be able to browse the John Varvatos items that are available at a store near them.

In-store pickup is becoming an important aspect of retail, as brands look to tap digital to help provide useful services.



John Varvatos looks to omnichannel with latest partnership. Image credit: John Varvatos

The ease of being able to check if a product is available nearby and reserve it to retrieve later attracts a wide range of affluent shoppers ([see story](#)).

Other brands even let customers find the products they want through innovative means. French fashion house Louis Vuitton is enhancing its mobile shopping experience through an updated application.

Among the additions to Louis Vuitton's app is visual search, which enables consumers to snap a handbag or garment that catches their eye in a magazine or on a passerby to find it in the brand's catalog. Mobile has become an important channel for reaching luxury consumers, enabling brands to engage with their clients anywhere they are.

Louis Vuitton's enhanced mobile app offers access to the entire catalog of Louis Vuitton products with a personalized browsing experience.



Louis Vuitton's Twist handbag. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

Consumers will be shown products that reflect their interests. For instance, the app will adjust whether the customer typically tends to buy handbags or jewelry ([see story](#)).

These efforts have taken the place of catalogs for many consumers, giving them more options to browse a brand's inventory and discover new items.

Magalogs

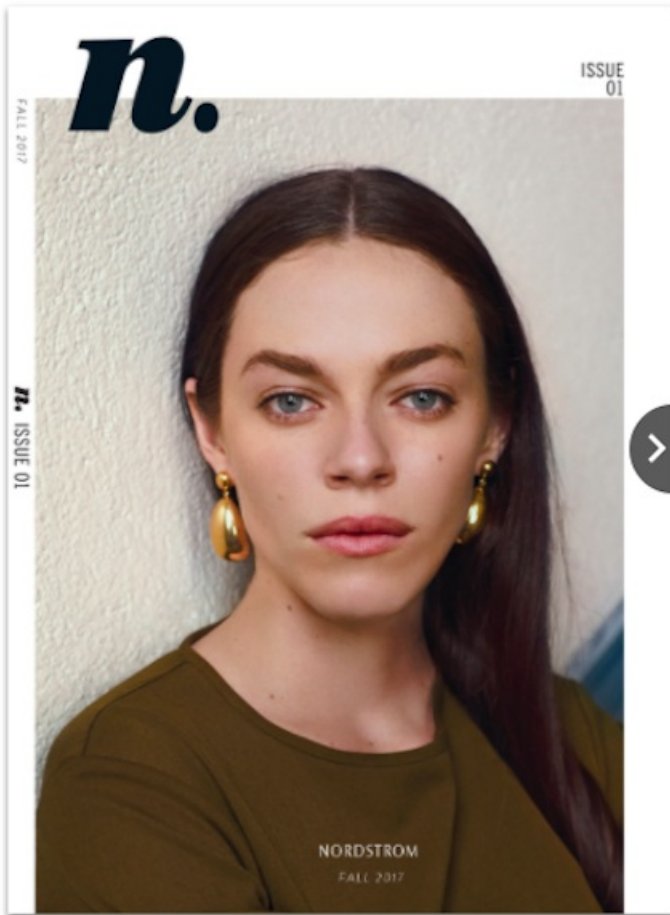
With so many other options available to them, customers today desire more quality content out of catalogs if they are going to engage with them at all.

That is where the concept of a magalog comes into play. Magalogs are a combination of magazine and catalog, fusing the typical spreads of upcoming and available products with the editorial aspects of a magazine.

These magalogs have become popular among high-end department stores. For instance, U.S. department store chain Nordstrom recently ventured into the world of digital publishing with the release of the first issue of its new online magazine, called simply "n."

The digital publication is a combination of editorial and catalog aspects, bringing customers not just images and prices of new products, but also putting those goods in the context of outfits and seasons. Nordstrom joins the many upscale retailers who now publish their own digital magalogs.

Nordstrom is no stranger to creating new digital experiences. The store prided itself on its robust loyalty programs and social marketing strategies.



N.'s Issue 01. Image credit: Nordstrom

Within the digital pages of *n.*, Nordstrom has created a space where it can debut new products, highlight specific collections and brands as well as offer buying guides for different categories of product to its customers ([see story](#)).

Department store Bergdorf Goodman is transporting consumers to New Orleans, LA to debut its latest collections.

For the pre-fall edition of its branded magazine, the retailer partnered with the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation to shoot a cover spread in the Southern city. Launched at the start of summer vacation season, the issue offered both fashion and travel inspiration.

Continuing the travel theme, Bergdorf Goodman asked stylish individuals where they are headed this summer for an editorial feature. With destinations as diverse as Martha's Vineyard and the Maldives, personalities including designer Gabriella Hearst and actress Samantha Barks offered a look at what they are packing for their trips.

Reflecting the New Orleans theme of the issue, the magazine features an interview with Sara Ruffin Costello, a designer and writer who relocated to New Orleans from New York six years ago ([see story](#)).

Magalogs can also incorporate other digital elements such as social media campaigns in a way that standard print magalogs cannot.

Similarly, department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue gave consumers a new way to experience its fall 2015 magalog through an animated Instagram feature.



Instagram profiles of @Saks and @Saks_Mens. Image credit: Saks Fifth Avenue

For the launch of what was its biggest publication to date, the retailer decided to roll out the red carpet, working with Hscusa.tv to create 3D models of the books, enabling consumers to flip through the entire magalog virtually. Retailers are increasingly adding digital and social touchpoints to their publications, allowing consumers to interact with content via the channel of their choice (see story).

Use of magalogs extends outside of the department store retail world as well. Brands from across sectors have created their own attempts at magalogs to engage with existing and prospective customers.

British automaker Bentley Motors is revitalizing its print magazine with new leadership and an eye on making the publication more appealing to prospective and existing clients.

The quarterly Bentley magazine is published around the world as a way of fostering a global Bentley community. Now, Bentley has brought in new leadership to create a magazine that can also be enjoyed by those who have not yet bought a Bentley, but may have plans to do so in the future (see story).

Digital replacing catalogs

Catalogs were once the starting point for the traditional path to purchase.

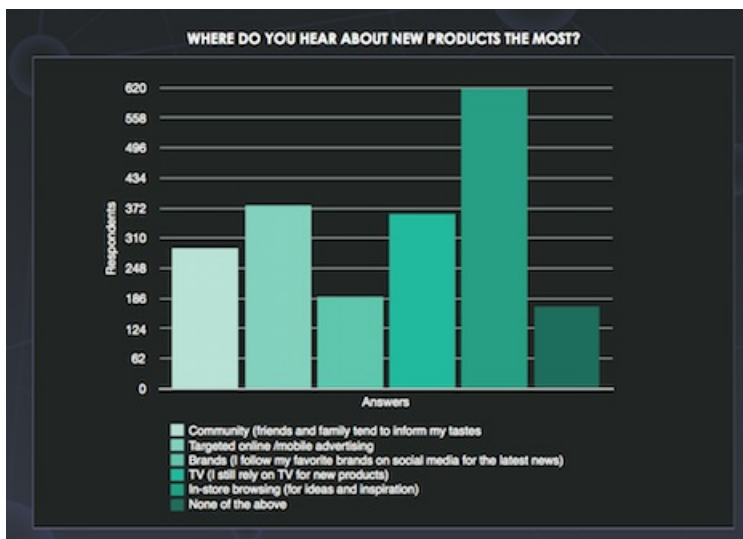
In their heyday, catalogs were eagerly awaited by customers to see what kinds of new products would be available at prestigious stores, allowing them to plan their shopping trips for the future in advance.

Now, however, the purchasing path looks very different.

It was once the common understanding in retail that shoppers follow a path to purchase, but that path today looks more like a web.

According to a new report on retail shopping habits from Blis, consumers now follow winding and circuitous paths to purchase, taking many detours and shopping through multiple channels at the same time. Despite consumers' increasingly complex and digital journeys to buying, Blis found that the store remains a key starting point for shoppers.

Today's shoppers are a fleeting bunch. Consumers routinely shop through many different channels at once, sampling different things and scouring for the best prices.



Product discovery. Image credit: Blis

Blis notes that modern consumers are more likely to hear about new products while browsing in-store than from the channels that were more traditional just a few years ago such as TV and word of mouth ([see story](#)).

Social media can be used as a new entry point for customers to begin their path to purchase.

Pinterest is expanding its recently launched Shopping Ads, looking to help more brands sell their products through its platform.

The new ad unit will allow brands to systematically create inventories of their buyable products for customers to browse in an automated and scalable way. While Instagram may be the preferred social media platform for luxury, Pinterest is still a valuable tool for fashion, home decor and other aspirational sectors ([see story](#)).

With Shopping Ads, customers will be able to view extensive inventories of brands from an ad on Pinterest, rather than just buying individual products from a branded post as was the norm before. These ads serve many of the same purposes that traditional catalogs do while adding the extra value of being shoppable immediately.

Social media has also taken the place of catalogs in China.

By 2025, 7.6 million Chinese households will represent RMB 1 trillion, or \$151.7 billion at current exchange rate, in luxury goods sales. This astonishing figure is more than the combined luxury consumption from France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In light of these figures, luxury brands need to understand the best way to reach these Chinese consumers.



China's consumers lean heavily on social media to discover new products. Image credit: Knight Frank

According to Chinese shopping recommendation and social network Dealmoon, this is often through word-of-mouth and social media. Chinese consumers rely heavily on social media and showing off products to their friends or asking for feedback and recommendations ([see story](#)).

Luxury brands have also taken to the Web to create methods of viewing and discovering new products that are far more interactive than traditional catalogs ever were.

For example, French home furnishings brand Ligne Roset is enhancing the browsing experience on its recently established ecommerce site through the addition of 3D product visualization.

Before making a furniture purchase, consumers engage with a retailer's store and online flagship an average of seven times. Knowing that consumers are turning to its Web site for research, Ligne Roset worked with tech firm Cyllindo to launch 360-degree product views, enabling shoppers to get a better sense of merchandise before purchasing.

While supporting online transactions, shopping is not the key focus of the site. Consumers are invited to explore collections through content before they are given the option to shop.

The editorially inspired product pages features extensive information, such as the designer behind the piece, the specifications and price range and photos of the product within a room, similar to what one would find in a traditional catalog ([see story](#)).

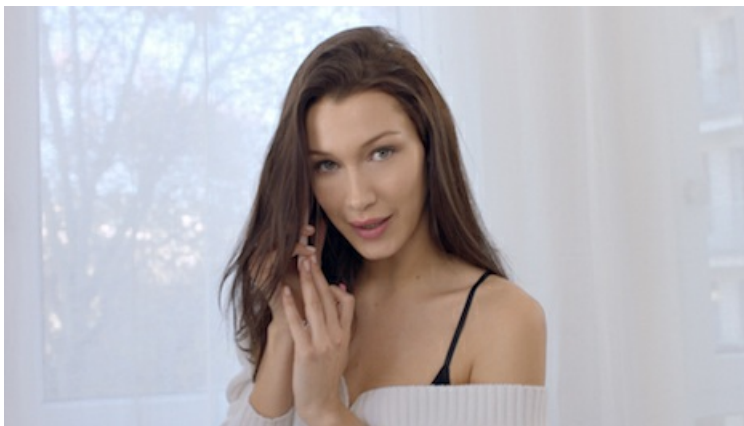
Influencers as the new catalogs

If catalogs are meant to give customers an in-depth view of potential products, showing them being worn and displayed in highly desirable ways, then influencers can also be said to act as a replacement for catalogs.

Influencers on popular platforms such as Instagram work directly with brands to showcase their products. An influencer might post multiple images on Instagram showing a variety of accessories from a brand in different scenarios and styles.

For instance, French fashion house Christian Dior is leveraging the It-girl popularity of Bella Hadid through beauty-themed social videos, a surefire way to glean the attention of millennials and Gen Z.

Ms. Hadid was appointed Dior Makeup's ambassador in May 2017 and counts nearly 10 million followers on her Instagram alone, ensuring any content created with the Dior is visible beyond its own social community. Since being named the face of Dior Makeup, Ms. Hadid has been featured in a number of tutorialized-yet-candid social films that feature the brand's cosmetics.



Bella Hadid in the Dior Makeup Series' The Call Time. Image credit: Dior

Each video shows off Ms. Hadid's personality and is shot in a relaxed manner that expresses the model's relatable qualities back to the consumer. The subject matter also concentrates on questions consumers may have regarding Dior Makeup, such as the best Rouge lipstick to wear on date night, making these videos not just a way to showcase the products but to also offer insight and advice on how to use them ([see story](#)).

Seventy-eight percent of marketers working in fashion, luxury and beauty report leveraging influencer campaigns, marking a 13 percent increase in the past year.

According to a report from Launchmetrics, brands are also investing more heavily in this tactic, with 60 percent of marketers expecting their budgets for influencer efforts to grow in 2018. With millennial and Generation Z consumers driving much of luxury's growth today, influencer marketing has become a key component of marketers' outreach to these digitally-native individuals ([see story](#)).

By investing heavily in a type of marketing that gives customers a closer look at products in a way that is engaging and comprehensive, brands are signaling that influencers are taking over some of the duties left in the wake of the decline of catalogs.

"More shoppers spend time online and enjoy following various micro influencers, bloggers, YouTube stars, experts and celebrities," Ms. Romero said. "When one of these influencers endorses a product and it is an authentic endorsement versus a paid one, then shoppers will be willing to try something.

"I do believe the most influential people to shoppers are their friends," she said.

Best practices

- Amy Romero, chief marketing officer of [CreativeDrive](#)
 - "The purpose of print catalogs should be advertising. They should be visually interesting and something a shopper can enjoy passively."
 - "Use online platforms and technology to bring your print catalog to the fore. Ikea is an example of a company that always finds clever ways to bring their yearly print catalog to online shoppers. In 2018, they launched the first ever human catalog. They engaged a young brilliant woman with a photographic memory to memorize their 300-plus page catalog and then asked their Facebook fans to watch and test her live."

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