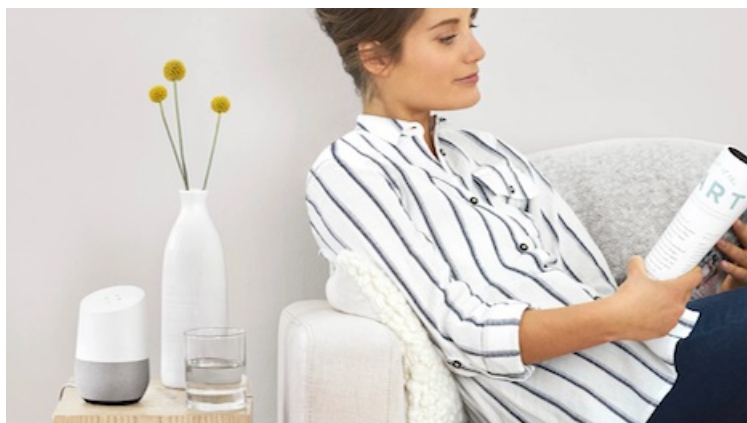


MARKETING

Google's China plans could give brands new window to Chinese customers

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Google is reportedly developing a version of its search engine that would pass Chinese censorship standards. Image credit: Google

By DANNY PARISI

Search giant Google has long resisted the urge to begin operations in China given the country's strict censorship laws that run counter to the company's core platform, but it is now changing its tune.

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Google is now planning on introducing a mobile version of its platform that will comply with those rules in an effort to get in on the lucrative market in China. For luxury brands who rely on Google for search and advertising tools and are also seeking Chinese customers, the move could be a real benefit.

Google's China plans

China is an incredibly valuable market for luxury brands. The power of the Chinese economy has proved tempting for companies across sectors and industries.

Due to its high volume of online shoppers, Google has been eyeing China for a while with plans announced earlier this year that it would develop a new version of its search engine for use in China.

While some both outside and in the company have decried this move for going against Google's values, the potential for advertising and selling to a whole new market of consumers through Google has become too enticing.



Western brands currently must go through Chinese platforms such as JD. Image credit: JD.com

For the many brands that use Google for discovery, advertising and even for ecommerce, the potential to work with Google to target Chinese customers is highly desirable.

China's firewall against most outside digital platforms such as Instagram, Google and Facebook has made it difficult for non-Chinese brands to reach those customers without going through an intermediary such as Alibaba or WeChat. This has necessitated building new relationships and learning new tools.

However, if Google were to operate in China, brands' existing relationships with the tech company would make the mediation between Western brand and Chinese customer smoother.

Gateways

Most efforts from luxury brands looking to reach Chinese customers have come in the form working with established Chinese platforms.

For example, British fashion label Mulberry is launching on Chinese ecommerce platform Secoo in time for Chinese Valentine's Day.

In honor of the holiday, the brand has created a limited-edition Amberley handbag, for which Secoo will be the exclusive ecommerce partner. Recently, a number of brands have entered partnerships with Chinese ecommerce sites to cater to local consumers ([see story](#)).



Mulberry is selling a special version of its Amberley bag on Secoo. Image credit: Mulberry

Similarly, global hospitality group Marriott International partnered with Chinese ecommerce platform Alibaba's Tmall in an effort to reach more than 500 million annual active users in the competitive Chinese market.

On July 28, Marriott became the first hospitality brand to participate in Tmall Super Brand Day. Unique hotel packages were specifically designed with Chinese travelers in mind and featured properties from brands including the St. Regis and The Ritz-Carlton ([see story](#)).

While these efforts are valuable for establishing trust and recognition with Chinese customers, working with a more familiar platform such as Google could have a positive effect on how non-Chinese brands fare in the lucrative Chinese market.

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