

RETAIL

Madison Avenue retailers bridge language barrier with Chinese app

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The Madison Avenue Business Improvement District is breaking down language barriers. Image credit: Madison Avenue BID

By STAFF REPORTS

The Madison Avenue Business Improvement District is aiming to make Chinese shoppers feel more welcome at its retailers through the use of mobile technology.

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During the Golden Week holiday earlier this month, the Madison Avenue BID teamed up with language assistance application Jeenie and Attract China to both get consumers in the door and facilitate connections between them and retail staff. Chinese consumers are driving the majority of luxury growth today, with these shoppers spending mostly while overseas.

"As global travelers, we are more likely to spend time in and return to international destinations where we feel welcome and understood," Kirsten Brecht Baker, CEO and cofounder of Jeenie, in a statement. "This is even more true for those new to traveling abroad.

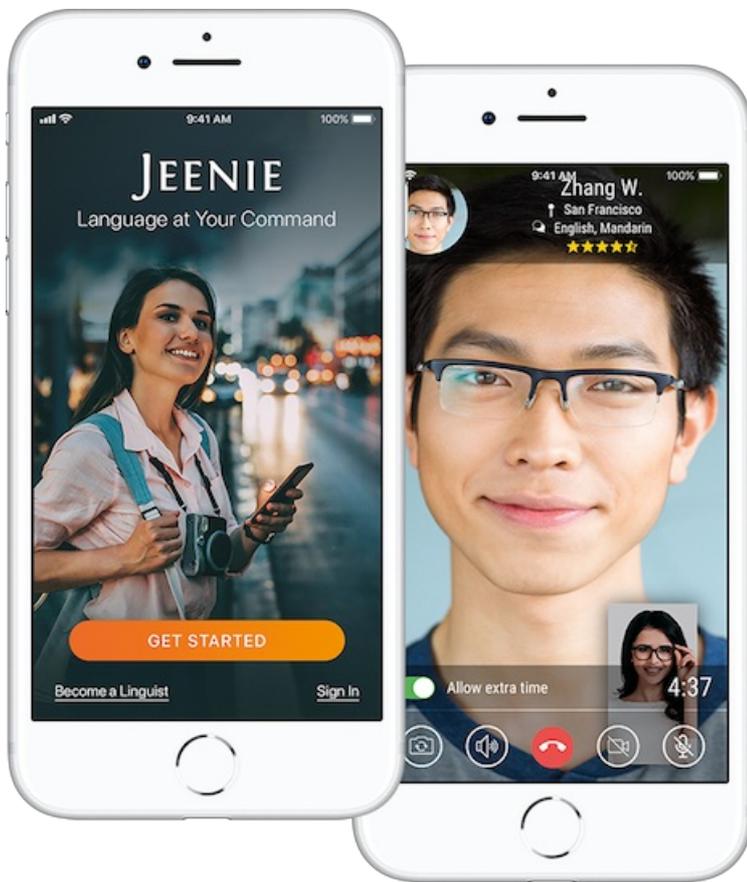
"At Jeenie, we are removing the anxiety behind visiting unfamiliar places," she said. "We make travel more accessible by helping to overcome any language or cultural barrier."

Translation tech

Among the retailers now taking advantage of on-demand access to Jeenie are Roberto Cavalli and Fred Leighton.

As opposed to a text or speech translation app, Jeenie facilitates three-way conversations between Chinese language experts, store staff and shoppers. This allows for a more authentic and accurate connection, including the discussion of product details or pricing.

Beyond the store itself, some retailers are taking service to the next level, gifting VIP clientele with access to Jeenie as they tour New York.



"We have much to offer Chinese visitors," said Matthew Bauer, president of the Madison Avenue BID, in a statement. "In an afternoon on Madison Avenue, shoppers can combine visits to cultural touchstones, like Central Park, The Met Breuer Museum and The Frick Collection, with luxury shopping experiences at the flagship boutiques of the world's leading fashion, jewelry and accessory brands.

"To attract more Chinese shoppers, we knew we had to address the language gap in order to help our retailers build longer-term relationships," he said. "This is why we approached Jeenie. The Jeenie mobile app provides our stores with an affordable way to access an English/Mandarin or English/Cantonese speakers at any time of the day."

As Chinese consumers now account for 32 percent of spend on luxury goods worldwide, even luxury retailers in the United States need to focus on catering to them by understanding the culture and adopting mobile trends.

Speaking at the Luxury Marketing Forum, the CEO of Attract China detailed the importance of catering to affluent Chinese travelers, explaining China will be the top source of visitors in North America by the year 2020. These travelers spend an average of \$7,200 per individual, likely reaching a total of \$61.5 billion by 2020 ([see story](#)).

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