

RESEARCH

Chinese consumers disappointed by luxury Web sites: study

August 3, 2011



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Luxury brands are doing their best to remain top-of-mind in the Asian markets, but Chinese consumers find that European and U.S. luxury Web sites are slow and confusing, according to a recent study from Strangeloop Networks.

The most obvious problem is page load time, which is mainly attributed to the use of Flash and superfluous images and video. Although these make for an aesthetically-pleasing site, many luxury brands are sacrificing functionality for beauty.

“Right now, one of the biggest differences between Chinese consumers and other consumers is that they’re spending and the rest of us are not,” said Joshua Bixby, president of [Strangeloop Networks](#), Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. “In 2009, when the global recession was at a low point, China was one of the few places where spending increased.

“What companies are really losing is the opportunity to get in early, to deliver a premium online experience, to grab this market as it’s just beginning to explode and to emerge as a leader in their category,” he said.

O load

There are a few factors that contribute to Chinese disappointment with luxury Web sites.

Load time is the main reason why the Chinese demographic is dissatisfied with luxury Web sites. Other companies have reported on the importance of fast load times to maintain consumer interest ([see story](#)).

Eighty percent of consumers will leave a page and not return if it takes more than three seconds to download, per the study.

“Usability experts and consumer reports both tell us the same thing: that online shoppers expect pages to load in two or three seconds or they’ll bounce,” Mr. Bixby said.

“When we tested the load time of major luxury brands as they appear to Internet users in urban China, we found that the average load time was 16.2 seconds, well above acceptable load time by any standard,” he said. “Many sites had load times that were even worse than that — up to 58 seconds.”

The study found that apparel and accessories designer Halston had the fastest site load at 1.942 seconds and was closely followed by Fred Leighton, Givenchy, Gianfranco Ferre and Mikimoto.



Halston's Web site

Halston's site is clean and bright, with a "click-to-enter" button in the middle of the page that takes consumers to a landing page with a multitude of images from its current collection.

However, fashion house Escada, Frederic Fekkai, Movado, Emanuel Ungaro and Boucheron were the slowest load times. Escada's load time is 58.811 seconds.

Escada's main image changes every few seconds, which means that the rich images are probably what takes it so long to load.

Up to 60 percent of online shoppers in China reportedly still use Internet Explorer 6, which is widely known to deliver a sub-par experience for users who are browsing modern Web sites, according to Mr. Bixby.

“There’s a huge gap between user expectations and the capabilities of the platform they’re browsing on,” Mr. Bixby said. “This gap presents a formidable challenge for site owners.”

China town

Many luxury brands claim to make themselves more available to Chinese consumers.

Top names such as Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Burberry and Gucci are increasing their bricks-and-mortar locations in the country at an accelerated rate.

However, only 36 percent of luxury branded sites offer a Chinese-language option, according to the study.

“Chinese shoppers are also different in terms of their expectations,” Mr. Bixby said. “Internet users in China are some of the most demanding in the world.”



Louis Vuitton's site is offered in many languages

In addition, Chinese consumers are going online in unprecedented numbers and are not close to stopping.

China has 420 million Internet users, which is more than five times as many as India and twice as many as the United States.

Six million new consumers are shopping online every month in China.

The study also forecasts China to overtake Japan as the largest luxury goods consumer in the world by 2015.

Indeed, in the depths of the recession in 2009, Chinese sale of luxury goods alone grew by 16 percent, according to the study.

To better-adjust their pages for Chinese consumers, luxury brands should keep a few factors in mind.

First, site owners need to make sure that their sites do not run into any issues with China's firewalls. This includes ads, widgets and social media tools, which can result in a site that never loads.

Additionally, marketers need to focus on speed in all pages of their sites, per Mr. Bixby.

To reiterate, the use of Flash and high-resolution images can greatly decrease the speed of a page download.

“Many luxury brands already have physical locations in major urban centers in China,” Mr. Bixby said. “They need to coordinate their marketing efforts to dovetail their online

presence with their bricks-and-mortar presence.

“[Many] Chinese consumers will not buy a big-ticket item without researching it online first,” he said. “Companies need to make sure their sites are performing well when potential customers are doing their research.

“Companies should aim to make sure that their Web site is the first source shoppers find and use before making their purchase.”

Final Take

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