

MARKETING

Luxury takes alternative approach to love for Valentine's Day

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Cartier is prompting consumers to gift their friends. Image credit: Cartier

By SARAH JONES

Leading up to Valentine's Day, luxury brands are expanding their marketing efforts beyond typical romantic themes, taking into account the diversity of love.

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In addition to amorous themes, brands are pushing consumers to self-gift or celebrate the platonic loves in their lives. Breaking out of the romantic mold may help brands reach more consumers around the holiday, which has previously been more limited to those in relationships.

"Valentine's Day has a much narrower gifting purview than most holidays," said Evan Magliocca, brand marketing manager at [Baesman Insights & Marketing](#), Columbus, OH.

"Where Christmas and back to school have a much broader set of products, Valentine's Day is typically siloed to jewelry and a few other types of merchandise," he said. "It makes it difficult for many retail brands to create content within that framework."

"What's brilliant is that they simply tossed aside that framework and made their own with self-gifting wherein any product can be thought of for Valentine's Day."

Revisiting Valentine's Day

Cartier is daring consumers to celebrate Valentine's Day in their own fashion. The jeweler has released a series of vignettes that show a range of love.

In one, a woman indulges in jewelry as she soaks in a bubble bath, piling rings onto her fingers. Other shorts find three female friends dancing to the tunes of a jukebox or rolling down a hotel hallway on a trolley.

At the end of each of the films, one of the individuals featured snaps Cartier's iconic red box closed in a playfully rebellious move.



[View this post on Instagram](#)

Dare to celebrate until sunrise. #PanthredeCartier

A post shared by Cartier Official (@cartier) on Feb 9, 2019 at 2:01am PST

Instagram post from Cartier

De Beers' Lightbox brand similarly opted for a Galentine's message, inviting consumers to gift its lab-grown diamonds to a friend.

Roger Vivier is also turning away from traditional romance, and is instead focusing on the love a woman has for its shoes. In a short film featuring French actress and singer Leslie Medina and set in Hotel Villa Royale, a young man is shown delivering a package.

As the delivery man moves through the hotel's hallways, he hears Ms. Medina singing and finds his way to her door. He is captivated by her song about wanting to find the perfect pair, a metaphor for love.

Ms. Medina finishes her song, and the delivery man makes a quick exit, leaving just a box of shoes on the floor outside her door.

Roger Vivier's Perfect Pair

Tamara Mellon is doing away with the notion that women have to wait for someone else to gift them something on Valentine's Day. In an email campaign, the label suggests, "Be your own damn Valentine."

Other brands including Versace and Lancme also suggested that consumers treat themselves.

YSL Beauty looked to break the mold with a Spotify edit titled "Not Another Valentine's Playlist." The collection of tracks focuses more on empowerment and freedom and less on heartbreak, with songs including Robyn's "Dancing on My Own" and Ariana Grande's "Thank U, Next."

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Empowering, edgy, glam. Time for you to listen to NOT ANOTHER VALENTINE'S PLAYLIST (Link in Bio) VOLUPTE PLUMP IN COLOUR N 2 Dazzling Fuchsia #yslbeauty #music #valentines

A post shared by YSL Beauty Official (@yslbeauty) on Feb 11, 2019 at 8:19am PST

Instagram post from YSL Beauty

For Valentine's Day, Valextra also took an alternative approach, teaming with Johanna Goodman to create fantastical artwork around its handbags.

"Luxury brands have struggled a bit with originality," Mr. Magliocca said. "Typically, luxury messaging is very aspirational, and while that still has a place, we've seen many brands try to connect with their customers by being real and closer to their customer's reality."

"Luxury brands hoping to find new customers and connect on a deeper level will succeed if they can get rid of some of the faade and become closer to their customer's mindset," he said.

Gifting trends

According to data from NPD Group, fragrances made a gifting comeback for 2017 holiday shopping, with sales up 5 percent year-over-year. After sales rose that December, fragrances saw 12 percent growth during Valentine's Day, and Mother's Day and Father's Day saw respective 9 and 11 percent rises in sales ([see story](#)).

The National Retail Federation found that while fewer consumers are planning to celebrate Valentine's Day this year, spending is up. Whereas 60 percent of U.S. adults had Valentine's Day plans 10 years ago, today it is only about half that mark the day.

Among the reasons not to celebrate were not having a significant other and a lack of interest. Others feel the holiday has become too commercialized.

More than a third of consumers who are not planning to mark the day in a traditional way still intend to splurge on themselves.

Contrary to traditional marketing that positions jewelry as a gifting item, millennial women are more apt to buy pieces for themselves than to receive them from others.

A report from MVI Research found that more than half of millennial age women indicate themselves as the primary buyer of jewelry in their households. Luxury marketers have begun to evolve their messaging surrounding jewelry, but as millennials become a bigger consumer base for high-end goods, it will become even more important to appeal to women themselves ([see story](#)).

Self-gifting efforts also enable brands to reach out to their existing clientele, rather than trying to expand their reach.

"Acquisition campaigns are complex enough and trying to integrate those with Valentine's Day is most likely going to leave a lot left on the table," Mr. Magliocca said. "Focus on your core customer, engage them and brands will see results."

"While I find social platforms to be highly over-inflated on many of the core metrics and their attribution to be lacking, they're still a very good place to go fishing for new customers," he said. "Trying to target significant others is complicated and probably too far down the line, but by targeting demographic groups on social channels brands can ensure they're getting their messages in front of the right audience for acquisition."

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