

MARKETING

Delivering luxury experiences hinges on humanity, authenticity, customization

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Luxury experience is about the personal touch. Image credit: Ponant

By SARAH JONES

As spending on experiences continues to eclipse sales of luxury goods, brands across sectors need to consider how they are delivering personal interactions that take consumers' individual preferences into account.

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Whether planning a bespoke travel excursion with seamless execution or allowing consumers to shop with the level of help they desire, luxury brands need to take their client's interests and needs into account. During a webinar hosted by *Luxury Daily* on April 24, panelists noted that while firms are leveraging data to provide the most targeted options, luxury comes down to the human touch.

"I often say luxury is a term like beauty, meaning that it truly is in the eye of the beholder," said Edie Rodriguez, chairman for the Americas and brand ambassador at [Ponant Cruise Lines](#). "It means different things to different people at different times."

Experience and efficiency

Enabling options and maintaining flexibility is key across sectors. For instance, hospitality brands should be ready to create reservations or fulfill travelers' wishes in a way that values their time.

Ms. Rodriguez explained that this could mean catering to preferences for hard or digital copies of materials, or booking last-minute tickets to a show. Companies should also try to anticipate any potential problems ahead of time.

Cheryl Dixon, vice president of communications and PR at [Coty](#) and adjunct professor at Columbia University, stressed that in the retail environment, enabling a range of independence to shoppers is important. For instance, whether a beauty client wants a high-touch consultation or the opportunity to explore and test on her own, brands should be ready to adapt to either need.



Sephora stores give consumers the option to play with products or have consultations with experts. Image credit: Sephora

Customer service is paramount in luxury, and Ms. Dixon noted that brands should be checking up on their Glassdoor ratings to ensure that staff are happy, since clients will be able to tell if they are not.

According to Miles Burton, head of agency and general manager at [Quintessentially](#), experience is not about selling first, but about putting a face to a brand through human interaction. If the experience does its job, the transaction will come organically.

Ms. Dixon also noted the importance of authenticity, and of brands providing information and guidance without it feeling commercial, such as travel providers suggesting itineraries.

One resounding theme of the panel was the desire for interaction and one-of-a-kind experiences.

In the restaurant business, consumers are moving more towards table options that enable them to talk to chefs or watch them at work. Oliver Lange, corporate executive chef at [Zuma Restaurants U.S.](#), noted that while the sushi bar seating used to primarily be used for walk-ins, today consumers are actually requesting to be seated there ahead of time.



Diners want to be able to see chefs in action. Image credit: Zuma

Also spurring interaction between chefs and diners are private rooms, which enable the intimacy of a dinner party with everything taken care of by the restaurant.

As millennials become a greater part of the luxury buying force, creating experiences that speak to their personal passions and provide the social currency they seek will be even more important.

Data driven

The panelists all noted the importance of technology in building and executing experiences.

For instance, Zuma creates customer profiles to track diners' likes and dislikes.

Quintessentially's measurements of a return on experience depend on where consumers are in the purchase funnel. Closer to the top, it is about acquisition, while once they draw nearer to the transaction, it is about loyalty.

By tracking consumers' journeys through experiences, the agency can not only see who was most engaged, but also use that consumer to find others who might be a fit for a certain product or service.



Data can be used to create experiences for clients. Image credit: Quintessentially

Although the luxury travel industry has been slower to innovate than other sectors, more hospitality brands are becoming increasingly comfortable using technology to enhance guests' experiences.

During a panel discussion entitled "Innovating in Luxury Travel in 2019" at Bloomberg's The Year Ahead in Luxury conference on Nov. 29, hospitality executives discussed how consumer data is harnessed to personalize travel experiences. Information gleaned from social media, the booking process and more can help luxury hospitality brands deliver tailored stays or trips ([see story](#)).

Unique experiences continue to be one of the defining characteristics of luxury purchases, as more mass market and premium labels encroach on traditional heritage brands.

During another panel, "Exploring the Increasing Importance of Experience to the Most Sophisticated Buyers of Luxury Products and Services," at the Italian Luxury Summit on Nov. 7, several brand executives across different sectors explained how exclusive experiences set brands apart for affluent ([see story](#)).

"Premium and mass brands meet expectations, luxury brands have a responsibility to elevate the expectations," Mr. Burton said.

"And personally, I would like to see luxury brands be a bit more radical about how they do that, beyond the traditional sales model, beyond the brick-and-mortar store experience," he said.

"How can they become more about inspiration instead of aspiration? How can they become more authentic instead of staged and presented? How can things become more intimate instead of exclusive?"

[Click here to access a recording of the webinar](#)

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