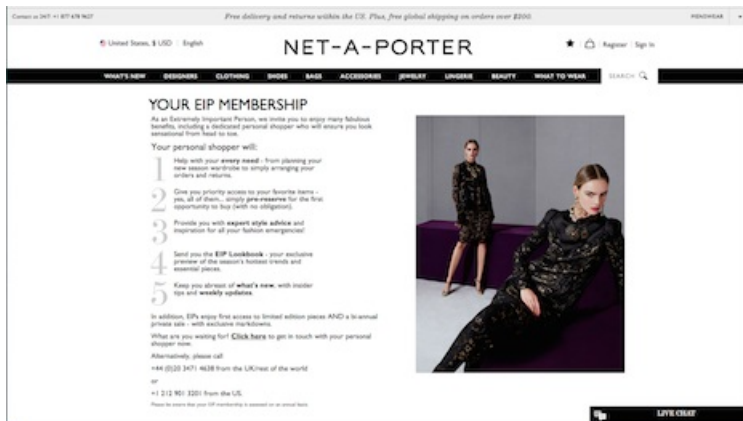


JEWELRY

Future of luxury? Digital transactions aided by trusted human advisors

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Big shot: Net-A-Porter's EIP page. Image credit: Net-A-Porter

By [Victoria Gomelsky](#)

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For years, luxury brands have lavished their bricks-and-mortar clients with attention and left their online clients to their own devices (literally), operating under the assumption that consumers, even at the very top of the luxury food chain, preferred their digital transactions to remain brief, efficient and anonymous.

But when it comes to attracting and keeping extremely wealthy clients, a growing cohort of jewelers believe the opposite to be true: Serving the world's most discerning customers in the digital realm requires an authentic human touch.

"It's the reverse of before," said Jasmine Hubjer, cofounder of [Boehmer et Bassenge](#), a fine jeweler specializing in exceptional diamonds and gemstones.

That realization is one reason why Boehmer et Bassenge recently joined [EIP Priv](#), a new invitation-only high jewelry platform introduced by [Net-A-Porter](#) in July.



Boehmer et Bassenge Leaf earrings

Very important

The brainchild of Net-A-Porter global buying director Elizabeth von der Goltz, EIP Priv the abbreviation stands for "Extremely Important People" is a curated marketplace for exceptional, one-of-a-kind jewels by six maisons: In addition to Boehmer et Bassenge, they include [Piaget](#), [Boghossian](#), [Bayco](#), [Nadia Morgenthaler](#) and [Giampiero Bodino](#).

"The concept for EIP Priv was to provide a seamless journey for our customer, and to offer a selection of brands not typically available online," Ms. von der Goltz said. "Nowhere in the world are all these brands showcased together, offering customers a truly new and immersive way to shop high jewelry."

In EIP Priv press materials, the platform is described as "a private and personalized space" where its most loyal customers just 5 percent of Net-A-Porter's customer base, according to some estimates will have access to the rarest jewels, both online and in private viewings "wherever the customer is in the world." A press release touts "'Try Before You Buy' services, and delivery to more than 170 countries."

Both Ms. Hubjer and Ms. Morgenthaler, neither of whom have sold online before, say it is EIP Priv's mix of digital and physical touch points that appeals to them.

"We must remember we are dealing with very busy people with full lives," Ms. Hubjer said. "This online approach allows them to be who they are, to browse and contemplate at their own pace, and then we fill their need within their schedule. We fly our pieces to them, or them to us."

Marco Hadjibay, creative director of New York-based Bayco, said he joined the platform because it made sense for the caliber of jewels in which the company specializes.

"The least expensive piece we have on their platform is \$100,000," he said. "It's an ornate square-cut blue sapphire ring, like a compass star of diamonds set atop a bed of pav sapphires. It's a very big ring, made of platinum and oxidized silver, very dark and very matte. It kind of looks like a dark sky with a star shining in the middle."

Net-A-Porter's expertise in handling high-net-worth clients online was another selling point, Mr. Hadjibay said.

"Today whether it's brick-and-mortar or online, there are two key factors: One of them is speed, as it's all about instant gratification.

"You have to have your inventory and logistics network prepared to move everything around really fast," he said.

"The second thing is quality of service: People buying products at that level really want white glove treatment from A to Z."

Talk is not cheap

When shopping for high jewelry, high-net-worth clients want the speed and convenience of a digital transaction combined with reassurance from a trusted advisor, said Milton Pedraza, CEO of New York-based [Luxury Institute](#).

"When it comes to a high value, high complexity and high-risk purchase, whether it's emotional or financial risk, you'll want a human being along," Mr. Pedraza said.

"The human connection injects the expertise and human intelligence drives the relationship. But it's still a very nascent concept and very contrary to the digital concepts we've grown up with."



Ring from Nadia Morgenthaler

At EIP Priv, the trusted advisor role is fulfilled by dedicated personal shoppers who can coordinate private viewings

along with a battery of personalized services, including customization and bespoke orders and sourcing of rare gems.

"Aside from what is on the site, our personal shopping team is able to source any piece from the participating ateliers around the world, and can go above and beyond what is shown in EIP Priv," Ms. von der Goltz said.

Other luxury Web sites have rolled out similar initiatives to target their top-tier buyers.

At **Farfetch**, for example, the company's Private Client loyalty program includes "access to Fashion Concierge, a service that sources products that are not found on our platform," said chief customer officer Stephanie Phair.

"Our Fashion Concierge team is able to source globally for exclusive, sold-out items and work with luxury brands around the world to track down items for clients, wherever in the world they may be," she said.

"Clients simply connect with our team and let them know what piece they are looking for and our team of amazing stylists take care of the rest, sourcing the item from wherever it is in the world."

Like Net-A-Porter, Farfetch has embraced the idea that wealthy shoppers desire and appreciate a person to guide them through the online buying experience, speak to them on the phone or meet in person.

"We use technology to enhance the retail experience for our very special private clients but behind every interaction and sale is a real person, an experienced stylist helping their client source longed-for items," Ms. Phair said.

"We offer our best customers unrivalled access to events with luxury brands," she said. "We give our clients a choice on how they prefer to engage with us. Our stylists and concierge team are happy to communicate via online channels such as email and WhatsApp or meeting the client in person."

FOR ALL THE hard-earned lessons luxury jewelers have learned about what constitutes success in the era of omnichannel retailing, perhaps the biggest takeaway is that shopping for jewelry at this level must involve a tangible experience.

"One can rarely capture the beauty or exquisite nature of diamonds and jewellery unless you have the opportunity to experience it firsthand," Ms. Hubjer said.

"To turn it, to allow the light to catch reflections at different angles, to admire the craftsmanship," she said. "This is authenticity. I have literally seen clients shake when they hold one of our pieces. That's so much fun, and not to be missed. It makes us smile and this is what makes our job so very beautiful and interesting."



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*Victoria Gomelsky is editor in chief of jewelry trade publication **JCK**, New York.*

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