

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## How Gucci is making over its client service centers

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*Inside Gucci 9 Hudson. Image courtesy of Gucci*

By SARAH JONES

Italian fashion house Gucci is seeking to make its remote client services more reflective of its in-store experience through a concept that blends a channel-agnostic approach with a human touch.

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Dubbed Gucci 9, the service center handles requests from consumers looking to shop at both the brand's boutiques and its online store, seeking to give all customers who contact the label a consistent experience. After opening locations in Florence, Tokyo, Seoul and Singapore, Gucci has expanded the footprint for Gucci 9 to North America with a center in the New York metro area situated in Jersey City, NJ.

"The idea about this place is very much to try to have a kind of an agnostic strategy across the channels, so the idea is that wherever the clients are coming from, they should be treated in the same way," said Marco Bizzarri, president/CEO of **Gucci**.

"And having the kind of help with the technology, but maintaining the relationship and the one-to-one contact with the client, for us, it's absolutely paramount," he said. "And I think as well going forward from a positioning that we are as a company, the kind of experience that we would like to give to the customers will be more and more centered to the human touch."

### Retail meets remote

Gucci 9 is named after the first service center under the new concept, which opened last December in Gucci's Florence headquarters within building number 9. Through this format, Gucci is looking to go beyond the typical call center environment.

The 35,000-square-foot Gucci 9 office space in Jersey City resembles a Gucci showroom or store, with racks of clothing and handbags displayed within the call center. A training room is modeled after the brand's showroom in Florence.



*Training room at Gucci 9 Hudson. Image courtesy of Gucci*

Gucci's artistic director Alessandro Michele had a hand in designing the look and feel of the space, which led to an on-brand aesthetic.

"We really believe that if you are surrounded by beauty, then you react by consequence," Mr. Bizzarri said. "If you see beautiful things, the way which you talk to people is better."

About a quarter of the team members at Gucci 9 have come from the brand's boutique network.

For new hires, Gucci is using a new strategy for hiring, in which hiring managers interview candidates while sitting back to back. This is intended to eliminate bias in the process as well as enabling the interviewer to listen for tone of voice.

"At the end, nobody sees the faces of these people," Mr. Bizzarri said. "So we try to understand what kind of empathy could come through the telephone, through the email."

"We believe that a smile has a sound, and it changes dramatically the way in which you perceive a person talking, whether they're smiling or not," he said.

Any customer who contacts Gucci, whether reaching out to a boutique or the ecommerce store, will be sent to the team at Gucci 9. This bricks-and-mortar move is intended to help remote clients get faster service, since in-store staff are often too busy with customers to answer calls quickly or stay on the phone.

Supporting the staff and facilitating a more seamless service for the customers, Gucci has tapped technology to provide a more thorough view of the clients.

A visualization on a wall mounted screen depicts real-time visitors to Gucci's online store as avatars, including information such as whether they have an abandoned cart. With a view towards being helpful but not intrusive, the staff can then offer assistance at certain points in the purchase journey, such as advice about sizing or help with checking out if they see customers lingering on those pages.

Allowing representatives to move away from their computer screens, they have been given wireless headsets. For instance, if they are discussing a particular handbag with a client they can walk over and interact with the purse to share details.

Another innovation is a program that uses talk to text technology to transcribe what is happening on a call. Key words are then searched by the machine to help the client service team member find a particular item the customer is asking about.

The focus is on one-to-one connections. Representatives who are on calls focus on the customer they are helping, rather than live chatting or drafting emails at the same time.



*Gucci 9 Hudson. Image courtesy of Gucci*

Gucci also does not push staff to keep their calls short, seeking to instead focus on providing the best possible experience.

As part of the move into Gucci 9 Hudson, the brand brought its aftersales department into the new offices, enabling them to use the same tools as the client service personnel. Previously, this department was housed in Gucci's fulfillment center in Secaucus, NJ.

Currently, Gucci 9 Hudson has about 150 client advisors who are fluent in eight languages. This team services about 50 direct-operated stores in North America, and Gucci plans to expand this to about 100 stores next year.

Across all of the Gucci 9 locations, the brand plans to increase its staff for these centers to 500 by 2020.

#### High-tech meets high-touch

Even though technology is taking over some aspects of brand interactions, the continued importance of human service cannot be overlooked.

During a panel discussion hosted by the Luxury Marketing Council on June 25, speakers agreed that luxury brands need to strike a balance between digital and physical assistance, since some aspects of customer service cannot be replicated through technology. Technology is also giving brands additional tools to deliver personalization, particularly when combined with a human touch ([see story](#)).

As the holiday shopping season kicks into high gear, retailers need to be prepared to handle high call volume and provide quality customer service.

Despite a growing number of brands automating customer interactions, many shoppers still prefer to speak with human service agents rather than chatbots or robo-calls. Research argues that both human and automated interactions have a place in customer service, calling for companies to find a balance between the two ([see story](#)).

Gucci 9 uses technology to support rather than supplant human interactions.

"The idea is to create the same spirit that we have in the shops," Mr. Bizzarri said.