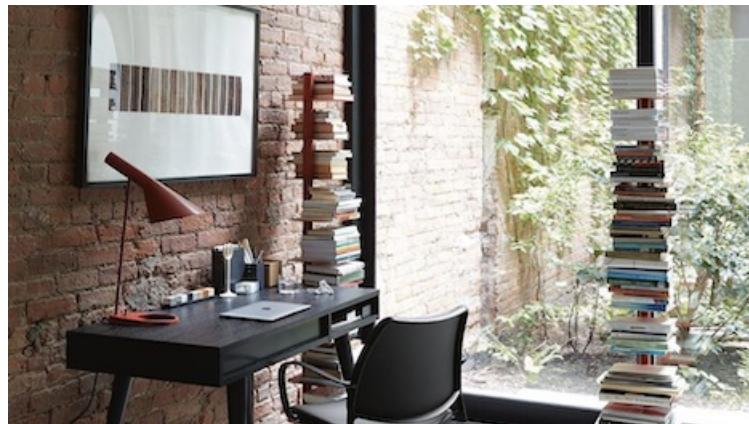


HOME FURNISHINGS

Home suite home: Enhancing furnishings in a remote-working environment

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Design Within Reach home office. Image credit: Design Within Reach

By DIANNA DILWORTH

As Instagram selfies of working from home abound, consumers are taking more pride in their home-office and dining-table environments.

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Luxury home furnishings brands looking to make up for lost sales with store closures could find a new opportunity in ecommerce sales to consumers who are working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Luxury home furnishing companies have an opportunity to satisfy people who are stuck at home and need a creative outlet," said Emmy Ellison, founder of Demaroc Home, Los Angeles. "This time at home gives people the opportunity to reimagine the place that they are spending so much time in."

Digital office

Facebook Live, Instagram Stories, webinars, WhatsApp and Zoom video conferencing are making people's living rooms their new offices and social hubs, and many people are hoping to spruce up their surroundings to impress the people on the other end.

In this new world of working from home, affluent consumers are looking for ways to stylize their homes to wow clients and bosses. Many are going to Instagram to look for new home decor and design ideas.

"It seems to be naturally occurring that more people are being exposed to new ideas and products than before," Ms. Ellison said. "Keeping an online presence through social media is a major way to keep business moving through ecommerce channels and to keep customers confident in the brand."

"Another way to do this is to make connections with other creatives who align well with your brand and mission to support one another," she said.

But as luxury home brands reach out to consumers at home, the messaging should be tactful and tactical.

Brands should assume that most consumers will be returning to their offices once the pandemic eases, so the products they promote should address short-term needs, rather than permanent home-office makeovers.

"The messaging should focus on stress-reducing customer service and solution-driven products," said Fred Reffsin, president of Brandgrowth, New York.

"What does the customer need right now to create an atmosphere of comfort and productivity?" he said. "Working from the dining room table is going to get old very quickly."



Emmy Ellison is founder of Demaroc Home in Los Angeles

Updated policies

Companies across luxury sectors have had to update their Web sites to adapt to the changes that consumers are currently facing, and home furnishings is not alone.

Demaroc, for instance, has changed its return policy to let clients take their time and change minds about a space in which they are suddenly spending so much time.

"I truly believe you should only surround yourself with objects that bring you joy," Ms. Ellison said.

"Giving people the time to sit and make their space perfect is one way that we are changing to accommodate customers in the current climate," she said.

At a time of social distancing, it is important that the customer experience be as stress-free as possible.

"There are real customer concerns about availability and delivery," Mr. Reffsin said. "This is a good time to assess your capabilities. If you're out of stock or expect delivery delays, be honest and transparent."

"Brands should expand existing services like chat, review their social media strategies and take better advantage of video to recreate the retail/showroom experience," he said.

"While all of these should be happening everyday, they take on greater importance now," he said.

"These actions should also be viewed as an opportunity to build brand equity which may not pay-off tomorrow, but will pay dividends at a later date."



Thomas Lavin proprietor of namesake showrooms in Los Angeles and Laguna, CA. Photo by Don Flood

Home furnishings business online

Just as consumers are going online for their meetings, so too are luxury home furnishings companies who have also had to quickly adapt to the current situation.

To-the-trade designers are now looking at new collections via video calls and on social media.

Like consumers, these home furnishings professionals are having a lot of their own Zoom and FaceTime meetings to help connect with clients, vendors and workrooms. These staffers are doing FaceTime and Zoom calls with clients with their kits to preview the new collections that were due to launch, for example, at the canceled Westweek market at the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles.

Thomas Lavin proprietor of namesake showrooms in Los Angeles and Laguna, CA, said that he has finally started using his Instagram account with video clips of show-and-tells of a new collection.

"We are working on getting some more personal ones up this week me cooking at home, things like that," Mr. Lavin said.

"We represent artisans and the handmade, so we find it important to celebrate that side of things," he said. "By the end of the week, we will have our new Pinterest up and running, which will help us reach a broader customer base."

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