

MARKETING

Why brand marketing is key during the lockdown

April 24, 2020



Ralph Lauren highlights its contributions during the Covid-19 crisis. Image credit: Ralph Lauren

By DIANNA DILWORTH

As luxury brands wait for stores to reopen after the coronavirus pandemic passes, many are focusing on their branding to connect with consumers whose lives have also come to a pause.

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Branding offers classic luxury brands a way to stay relevant without seeming transactional at a time when consumers are more concerned about their health than their look and others are insecure about the future of their job as the economic downturn continues to deepen.

"At the moment, consumers are not spending," said Ana Andjelic, brand strategist and formerly chief brand officer of Rebecca Minkoff. "When there's a limited demand, a brand should focus their marketing resources on maintaining the relationship with their customers.

"Branding comes in as a non-transactional, non-product focused way to maintain this relationship," she said. "It's all about conveying a brand's cultural point of view and a strong visual language and tone of voice."



Chanel celebrates its heritage and during the COVID-19 crisis with a social media post celebrating founder Gabrielle Chanel. Image credit: Chanel

Staying relevant

There are plenty of ways for brands to stay relevant to consumers beyond promoting transactions.

"Brands are, by their very nature, part of culture and of social interactions, they shape our aspirations, our behaviors, and are one of our sources of influence," Ms. Andjelic said.

"At the moment, a brand should really play on its strengths, be it a connection to a locale or provenance, craftsmanship or artistry, having a strong community, having a unique cultural point of view and then translate these strengths into content, community management, collaborations and curation," she said.

"The fact that consumers are not buying right now doesn't mean that they do not want distraction, information, entertainment and a sense of connection and belonging."

The best way for luxury brands to promote their branding at this time is through their presence in culture and in customers' lives.

LVMH's Sephora recently debuted a new campaign to celebrate Women's History month called "The Unlimited Power of Beauty." The effort connected the brand's core values that each woman's beauty is unique.

Marc Jacobs and Gucci recently ran social media campaigns highlighting their employees at home looks, a move to connect with consumers who are also in lockdown themselves. By highlighting the people that work for the designers, the branding messages show the humanity behind the products.

"No one is going to react well to a brand broadcasting itself at the moment," Ms. Andjelic said. "But if a brand looks for a community connection, either within their own employees, like Marc Jacobs did, or partner up with a charity to do something good at this time, that will be noted.

"Brands' role right now is to be part of the community, not to crowbar themselves into the conversation," she said.



Louis Vuitton turns to the archives to celebrate its heritage and give consumers a chance to travel via social media. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

Avoid selling

While brands are already feeling the bottom-line losses as retailers are shuttered, that does not mean that they should start pushing product.

Now is not the time for aggressive sales pitches, self-promotion or broadcasting polished campaign imagery and videos or working with influencers in a tone-deaf way. They have to acknowledge the situation of their customers.

Consumers are responding well to messaging that shows hope and human connection. Brands that strike this chord will likely connect to their fans.

Ralph Lauren for instance, pledged \$10 million to help its teams and communities around the world, including a network of international cancer charities.

Additionally, the company has donated 250,000 masks and 25,000 isolation gowns to U.S. frontline workers, and 25,000 meals to NHS workers in the United Kingdom. The brand used its Instagram channels to share photos and honor these workers.

LVMH brand Louis Vuitton also took to Instagram to show its efforts to make masks for healthcare workers in France.

Additionally, the French luxury conglomerate is focused on branding by sharing evocative imagery from its archives to celebrate the #SpiritOfTravel campaigns. This campaign taps the brand's heritage to entertain and console consumers who are bored at home.

Chanel has been celebrating its heritage by telling the story of its founder.

"Consumers respond well to messaging that shows compassion, care and communal spirit," Ms. Andjelic said.

"They are quick to cancel brands and influencers that come across as greedy or selfish or tone deaf."



Ralph Lauren honors healthcare workers during the COVID-19 crisis. Image credit: Ralph Lauren

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