

RETAIL

Facebook Shops is option for small luxury brands and retailers to scale

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Live chatting via Facebook Shops. Image credit: Facebook

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Facebook has introduced a new tool to help small businesses sell directly from the social marketing platform. The tool might be a boon to small luxury brands or boutiques that want to sell directly to customers online.

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Facebook Shops lets small businesses set up a single online store accessible on both Facebook and Instagram, free of charge.

"Small shops that want an easy Web site solution can utilize Facebook shops to sell and promote their luxury goods on both Facebook and Instagram," said Rania Sedhom, founder/managing partner of **Sedhom Law Group**, New York.

"For those small shops that already use Shopify-enabled Web sites, they can easily add a Facebook store to their online ecommerce site," she said.



Instagram Shops. Image credit: Facebook

Digital merchandising

Facebook Shops allow these small vendors to merchandise specific items from their catalog by highlighting select

goods.

Additionally, they can customize the design of their shop with a cover image and accent colors.

"Since many luxury brands are focused on a more white-glove service for their customers, they should take advantage of the ability to create curated collections through Facebook Shops," said Ryan Gellis, CEO of **RMG Media**, New York.

"They should also be deliberate in either tying promotions together with their live sites or running social-specific campaigns exclusive to customers on those networks," he said.

"In combination with live chat capabilities, Facebook Shops can be a powerful new acquisition and retention tool for brands looking to deliver a high-class online experience."

Social media users can find Facebook Shops on a business' Facebook Page or Instagram profile or through stories or ads. Once a consumer clicks on the page, she can browse the full collection, save products and place an order either on the business' Web site or directly through Facebook, if the business has enabled the checkout feature.

"Every business should be focused on new customer acquisition, but small sellers will be particularly focused on this marketing initiative," Mr. Gellis said.

"Facebook has a built-in market of potential customers," he said. "New brands can be reaching to establish their presence in the market.

"Facebook Shops will give this market the capability to purchase from your brand without the huge context switch of leaving the social network to shop on a different Web site. This allows small sellers to be more purposeful in their social marketing campaigns to simultaneously grow their followers and their bottom line."



Live shopping via Facebook Shops. Image credit: Facebook

Interactive communications

Facebook Shops are designed to be as interactive as an in-store shopping experience.

Vendors have been using Facebook Live to see products for years, and now the social giant is going to make the experience more sophisticated.

Coming soon, sellers will be able to tag products from their Facebook Shop or catalog before going live. Those products will be shown at the bottom of the video to make the path to purchase smoother.

The Facebook Shops platform also allows real time chat to make it feel like consumers are in a real store.

Using WhatsApp, Messenger or Instagram Direct, consumers can ask questions, track deliveries and other customer service features.

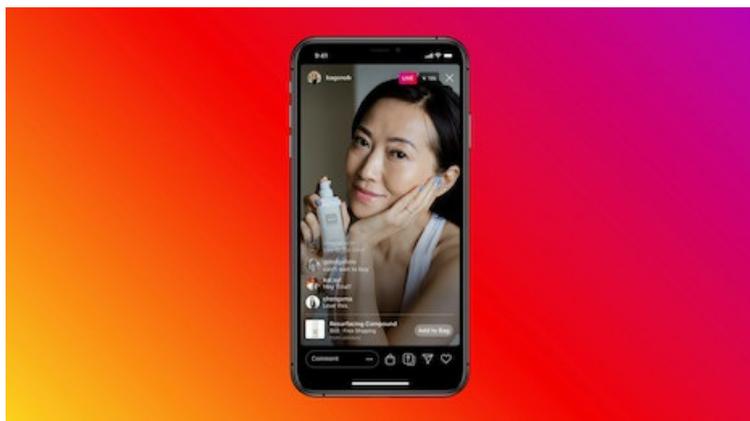
The company has plans to make purchases available directly right within a chat in WhatsApp, Messenger or Instagram Direct.

"The Facebook chat feature allows you to provide real-time customer service to interested buyers," Ms. Sedhom said. "It is also a feature that can help enhance a customer's checkout experience, for example, by showing products that coordinate well with the items the customer is chatting about.

"Livestream is interactive and allows designers and boutiques to demonstrate and showcase products," she said. "When a customer likes a product, they simply screenshot what they want to buy, send it to the store or designer by

chat or email, and make a purchase.

"This may be particularly helpful when selling clothes, so that you can discuss how the item hangs on the body and give the customer a better sense of the color. Because it is live, it may prove more valuable than pre-recorded sales presentations such as those on YouTube."



Live shopping via Facebook Shops on Instagram. Image credit: Facebook

Beyond COVID-19

Social marketing and ecommerce have been merging more in recent years, and COVID-19 lockdowns have only accelerated this process. And it looks like it is here to stay.

This latest release from Facebook hints that consumers will not abandon following online influencers and shopping online anytime soon. In fact, it may become easier than ever, even when stores do reopen.

"The silver lining to everyone social distancing and being home more often is that the world just became much more comfortable with the idea of working and shopping remotely," Mr. Gellis said.

"I don't think we'll ever be able to fully replicate the feeling of walking through a physical store and being greeted and helped by real human beings, though AR/VR might give this experience a run for its money, but I don't believe online shopping will fall back to pre-coronavirus levels anytime soon after stores reopen," he said.

"If anything, smart brands should use the new traffic patterns online to responsibly drive more foot traffic in the real world, especially once there is a vaccine for COVID-19 and people are more comfortable shopping in-person again. You just don't have the same ability online to influence impulse purchases like you do in-store."

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