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## How the in-store selling ceremony will have to adapt

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*The luxury selling ceremony is in for a major overhaul. Image credit: Cegid*

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

The in-person selling ceremony has been key to the experience of luxury shopping, but COVID-19 lockdowns and social distancing guidelines have upended the whole process.

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Luxury brands and retailers are now scrambling to beef up their omnichannel selling ceremonies that meshes tradition with technology to offer customer experience in the retail "new normal," as business management software provider **Cegid** points out.

### Hybrid model

While COVID-19 has imposed short-term changes in consumer and corporate behavior, some are here to stay. This includes a "phygital" mindset, as Bain puts it, combining the digital and bricks-and-mortar channels.

Also here to stay are heightened environmental and social consciousness, stronger local pride, acceleration of the post-aspirational mindset and demands for intimacy, entertainment and emotions, per Bain.

Not surprisingly, the in-store selling ceremony is in for a major overhaul. As luxury marketers rethink their selling ceremonies, Cegid has recommended changes keeping three long-term trends in mind.

First is storytelling at a distance.

Luxury marketers have tried to simulate the live fashion show during the peak of the pandemic lockdowns via digital storytelling.

For example, **Galleries Lafayette** let shoppers browse and shop for luxury and designer items through live video, with expert assistance from personal shoppers or brand representatives.

**Louis Vuitton**, for its part, debuted a Valentine's Day exclusive popup store via WeChat, allowing store employees to offer consultations, customer service and exclusive offline promotions via QR code and doubling its online sales compared to the prior year's Valentine's season, as Cegid pointed out.

Digital technology also helped with sales.

U.S. fashion designer Rebecca Minkoff founded that a consumer who viewed a product in augmented reality became 65 percent more likely to make a purchase.

"Digital tools empower luxury brands to showcase their heritage, tap into growing appetites for experiences and tell brand stories, such as responsible sourcing from artisans," Cegid said in a statement.

"With even in-person events increasingly infused with technology, luxury brands will be able to rely on their growing tech capabilities even when digital is not the only option," he said.

Next up is elevated omnichannel delivery.

While omnichannel capability was already key, the pandemic has hastened its adoption.

Services such as click-and-collect, curbside pickup, ship from store, contactless payment, virtual payments and phone sales have become more commonplace in retail. These services must be elevated, according to Cegid.

The upgrade should include elegant packaging and personalized delivery to homes by store employees or chauffeurs, supported by local fulfillment for speedy, efficient and sustainable fulfillment to move inventory sitting in stores.

Many department stores in the United States, including Saks Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom and Neiman Marcus offer these options, as well as some luxury brands.

In fact, buy online, pick up in-store (BOPIS) is growing in popularity across retail.

Per Cegid, more than half of retailers in a [recent survey](#) believe that 40 percent or more of their revenue will come from BOPIS orders in three years' time.

The final trend is safe and exclusive in-store experiences.

Luxury brands are firmly committed to the idea that the best experiences are in-store and in-person, encouraging shoppers with exclusive products and experiences.

Now, stores require social distancing, following arrow markings on the floor, wearing masks, even donning gloves and socks in some cases.

Some brands, such as Sergio Rossi and the non-luxury Apple offer shopping by appointment. Temperature checks are also becoming a feature to shop in some stores.

Appointments not only curb crowding, but also let in-store personal shoppers pull items in advance. Items tried on are then quarantined.

"These changes also require store associates to be more multi-faceted than ever," Cegid said. "They must adapt their selling and service skills to in-home and digital channels; serve as safety experts; work as brand ambassadors able to handle social media takeovers; stay tech-savvy in the use of mobile and other in-store devices; and be efficient in-store order pickers and packers.

"They also need the emotional intelligence to read and communicate with clientele about safety and service according to their personal comfort levels, all while speaking the brand's language.

"With much uncertainty remaining, what is crystal clear is that succeeding as a luxury brand will demand flexibility across every facet of the business, including the selling ceremony."