

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Mark Cross is adapting to the pandemic with digital services

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Mark Cross takes inspiration from 1905 trunk in Pre-Fall 2020 Collection. Image credit: Mark Cross

By DIANNA DILWORTH

U.S. leather goods house Mark Cross is adapting to the challenges of the global public health crisis by focusing on a "Survival to Thrival 2020 strategy," while keeping focus on the brand's core consumer-centric, digital-first roadmap.

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The brand has shifted its investment into ecommerce and digital media, with a resulting claimed increase in traffic and conversions.

"There is an imminent opportunity to transfer performance leaps and lessons learned from the survival mode to our new thrival strategy, rather than returning to the previous ways of working," said Ulrik Garde, CEO of Mark Cross, Paris. "With our unique, authentic heritage, it is important to respect our strong DNA, but only whilst staying relevant to the consumer of the future.

"We remain committed to creating products that are made to last, with the finest quality fabric and timeless designs what we've coined as future vintage," he said.



Mark Cross takes a "future vintage" approach to its pre-fall 2020 collection. Image credit: Mark Cross

New look

Earlier this month, Mark Cross launched the 1845 Mini Trunk Limited Edition Collection 20 unique pieces made from upcycled leathers from previous collections that was inspired by a Mark Cross advertisement from the archives: a 1905 *New York Times* ad featured a trunk.

"We felt it was a great opportunity to celebrate Mark Cross' 175th anniversary while also paying homage to our special iconic box shape from the Rear Window and Grace Box Styles," Mr. Garde said. "It shows how a beautiful one-of-a-kind, bespoke collection of pieces can be created using our own upcycled materials, and this strategy can be replicated for future launches."

The brand debuted its Artist in Residence program last year, in which the brand supports up and coming artists who work with the brand on innovation.

The latest Artist in Residence is Brooklyn, NY-based weaver and textile artist Meghan Spielman, who studied at Parsons and the Royal College of Art in London. Ms. Spielman created custom woven panels for key styles in the brand's latest pre-fall 2020 collection.

"Building brand loyalty for Mark Cross today very much about engagement and being a part of specific communities," Mr. Garde said.

"Furthermore, to build brand loyalty, our focus is around customer service, making sure that we both on and offline deliver the ultimate service," he said.

"With the interim closure of our New York Madison Avenue flagship, we have shifted gears a bit and have started to open popup shops in locations that we feel many of our consumers are currently based."

For example, the company partnered with The Surf Lodge in Montauk, New York in the beginning of August to showcase current styles, since a large portion of its New York-based clientele has been spending lockdown in the tony Hamptons.

"This popup allowed us to showcase new pieces that consumers were not able to see in store, as the pieces weren't available when the world went into lockdown," Mr. Garde said.

"We've also created the World of Mark Cross popup concept which launched in mid-July at Lane Crawford in Hong Kong and will move throughout Asia, including stops in Lane Crawford's Shanghai and Chengdu locations, and with our retail partners in Japan and Boon the Shop in South Korea," he said.

"As the World of Mark Cross is a fully self-contained sustainable concept, it also fits perfectly into Selfridges' Project Earth initiative in London where we will be launching new collections in October, allowing customers to travel through centuries featuring unique vintage pieces and new functional styles."



Mark Cross uses subtle textures & autumnal tones in the Pre-Fall 2020 Collection. Image credit: Mark Cross

Digital shopping

As the consumer increasingly shops online, Mark Cross is enhancing its digital capabilities with new services and experiences to reimagine the in-person experience seamlessly offline and online.

For instance, the brand debuted a digital platform called Hero, which sales associates can use to interact with customers digitally, giving associates a way to deliver personalized shopping experiences at a distance.

Additionally, the company has created an app called Toshi that works to bring in-store services directly to customers' homes.

Delivery personnel are trained to handle styling, up-selling and adjustments on-site to bring the store experience home.

"In difficult times, we typically see consumers looking to make more conscious choices and, thus, they tend to return more quickly to quality, timeless, last-forever investment pieces than for more fashion-forward pieces," Mr. Garde said. "I saw this during the 2008 financial crisis and expect to see this again.

"In addition to seeing stronger interest with investment pieces, there will be an uptick in sales on our vintage Web platform, especially as consumers look to make purchases that have longevity or represent sentimental value," he said.

"Heading into 2021, I see the luxury and fashion industries coming out of the current crisis stronger than ever. We've had the time to focus on what is most important for our brand and evaluate how consumer behavior and expectations have shifted."

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