

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Luxury labels put people at the forefront of digital experiences during pandemic

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Burberry livestreamed its spring/summer 2021 runway show during LFW in September. Image credit: Burberry

By SARAH RAMIREZ

The coronavirus pandemic has forced the luxury industry to adapt many business practices, and fashion brands have finally had to embrace digital collection launches as a way to reach audiences.

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Luxury marketers speaking at a panel at **Launchmetrics'** Performance digital summit on Nov. 5 shared how fashion brands have pivoted during the pandemic. When it comes to launching new clothing collections, brands have become more accessible and creative to maintain momentum.

"There was definitely a level of adaptation that [brands] had to do because at the end of the day, digital became the forefront of everything they did," said Tatiana Ferreira, chief customer officer at Launchmetrics.

Digital adaptations

As a result of the luxury industry's reliance on Chinese consumers, the sector was among the first impacted by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

Even brands that had a strong digital and social foundation struggled to adjust during the first panicked months of the pandemic, explained Launchmetric's Ms. Ferreira.

French fashion label Dior, which typically schedules content two to three months in advance put all communications on hold temporarily when the first wave of lockdowns began. Taking into widespread boutique closures as well as consumers' fears and concerns, the brand pivoted to focusing on core values rather than product promotions.



The Dior 2021 cruise campaign and collection emphasized craftsmanship, rather than extravagance. Image credit: Dior

"It's a bit less scary, but we are more prepared," said Gary Pinagot, social media ereputation director at **Dior**.

As the pandemic progressed and protocols evolved, fashion brands turned to innovative campaigns to debut new collections. Hybrid presentations, digital fashion weeks and live streamed shows have become commonplace in the span of months ([see story](#)).

These digital collection launches will not eliminate fashion shows forever, according to Tatiana Dupond, head of luxury at **Linkedin**. She argues that these live events go far beyond the pieces shown, to a more immersive experience with set design and music playing a role.

Digital fashion presentations, however, have democratized luxury and made the experiences even more accessible to millions of consumers. Ms. Dupond encourages brands to be consistent with their messaging and share the inspiration behind their collections, while being mindful of the audiences they are reaching.



LinkedIn has become a valuable platform for brands to share details behind collections. Image credit: Dior on LinkedIn

Dior has also reevaluated its approach to influencer marketing, reaching out to influencers with previously established relationships.

According to Mr. Pinagot, the conversations were about relationship building on multiple fronts as the Dior team wanted to ensure influencers were faring well during the pandemic. While authenticity and storytelling remain paramount in influencer marketing, discussions also covered how social media content could be more considerate during the pandemic initially moving away from product photos or travel posts.

"Having almost a human-first mentality and approach I think is so important," Ms. Ferreira said. "Always but especially during this time when it's so much more sensitive."

Maintaining momentum

Luxury brands have also had to change their approach to maintaining momentum after a fashion show.

Traditionally, buyers and editors attend presentations and build awareness through magazine spreads and the like.

Dior and Gucci are two brands that have looked to extend the impact of digital collection launches with

supplemental content spread out over weeks and even months.

This summer, Dior presented the cruise 2021 collection without a live audience at the Piazza del Duomo in Lecce, a city in the Puglia region, where it blended the brand's heritage with the region's traditions and craftsmanship ([see story](#)).

The label followed up the show with a documentary in November, which deeply examines the inspiration drawn for the collection and explores a place held close to the heart of Dior creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri ([see story](#)). Dior also promoted the collection in a visually and audibly stimulating short film ([see story](#)).

Italian fashion label Gucci initially introduced its Epilogue theme in February when creative director Alessandro Michele brought the dressing rooms to center stage at Milan Fashion Week. In July, Mr. Michele presented his Epilogue collection through a livestreaming event accompanied by the release of a visual narrative feature ([see story](#)) with a final installment revealed in October ([see story](#)).

More recently, Gucci is showcasing its newest collection and highlighting the work of emerging designers through a digital film festival dubbed #GucciFest ([see story](#)).

Looking forward, it is difficult to predict how industry insiders, as well as consumers, will react once traditional fashion weeks resume. The most resistant luxury brands have become more receptive to digital channels, but many consumers may also crave more face-to-face experiences.

"I think it's the million dollar question in industry these days like," LinkedIn's Ms. Dupond said. "How do you bring harmony in offline and online?"

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