

LUXURY DAILY AWARDS

Saks Fifth Avenue is 2020 Luxury Retailer of the Year

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Saks window depicting a solitary mannequin looking for adventure. Image: Saks Fifth Avenue

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is Luxury Daily's 2020 Retailer of the Year for its adaptability and successful digital advancements amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the year, Saks implemented strategies that successfully combined the in-store experience with digital developments, placing a significant focus on customer personalization and ease and, ultimately, creating new practices for the digital era and mobilizing product presentation. Additionally, the department store harnessed impactful charitable partnerships and campaigns to combat the global crisis.

"We needed to determine how to serve our customers in new and different ways to evolve with changing lifestyles and shopping preferences," said Emily Essner, chief marketing officer of **Saks Fifth Avenue**, New York. "We constantly evaluate what is working for stores and clients to create the best experience possible.

"In 2020, we launched several initiatives, including virtual eventing, integrated online and in-store shopping experiences and contactless services," she said.

The Luxury Retailer of the Year award was decided based on retailers' use of impeccable strategy, tactics, creative, executive and results. All candidates selected by the Luxury Daily editorial team had to have appeared in Luxury Daily coverage this year. **Judging was based purely on merit.**

New era for retail

Once the pandemic hit, retailers were forced to think creatively about how to keep customers engaged without the power of the in-store shopping experience.

Saks partnered with wholesale ecommerce platform **NuOrder** to streamline the store's buying process and merchandising approach. In June, Saks announced it would use NuOrder's technology to digitally curate and deliver a fresh merchandise assortment across the apparel, footwear and accessory verticals.

Through NuOrder's ability to present the full seasonal market buy in a visually easy-to-use presentation, this technology allows the Saks buying team to more efficiently identify merchandising opportunities aligned with seasonal trends and customer expectations ([see story](#)).



Saks Fifth Avenue New York main floor with hand sanitizer station at left. Image courtesy of Saks Fifth Avenue

In October, the store launched a new website, marking the first comprehensive website redesign from the retailer in the last five years. Using Salesforce Commerce Cloud, saks.com now emphasizes fashion, convenience and personalization while ensuring flexibility for future enhancements.

The site now allows customers to add items directly to their cart or "Wish List" from a variety of products, while product pages now feature a stylized "Complete the Look" section with the ability to add items directly to cart. Additional filtering options, such as buy-online-pickup-in-store (BOPIS), same-day delivery, preorder and currently available are also offered to provide a more convenient shopping experience ([see story](#)).

While store operations of luxury brands and retailers stalled during the heart of the COVID-19 lockdowns, ecommerce and curbside pickup eased the pain for customers and sellers. However, there was no simple remedy for retailers' dining facilities and restaurants.

Although some department stores around the world have opened their restaurants and cafs, many preferred not to take the risk. Saks got creative in its effort to keep their customers happy.

[L'Avenue](#), a popular French restaurant for shoppers at Saks' iconic Manhattan store, offered do-it-yourself meal kits, cocktails and Pierre Hermé desserts for New York pickup, as well as delivery to the Hamptons ([see story](#)).



Saks Fifth Avenue flagship store in New York across from Rockefeller Center. Image courtesy of Saks Fifth Avenue

Before the significant onset of the global pandemic in the United States, the Saks Fifth Avenue Foundation debuted a mural dedicated to mental health awareness in the windows of the flagship store in New York. Saks partnered with [Fountain House](#) and [Crisis Text Line](#) as part of its mission to address mental health issues in local communities by raising awareness, improving access to care and promoting tools and skills for those who need it the most.

The windows showed artwork by Fountain House Gallery artist Osvaldo Cruz. The mural, called "We Are Not Alone," aimed to address the challenge of living with mental health issues such as social isolation, shame and stigma ([see story](#)).

Once the pandemic hit, Saks continued its charitable endeavors as Saks Fifth Avenue Foundation made a \$600,000 emergency grant to support patient care and offer funding to charitable partners attempting to tackle mental health needs in response to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. The foundation has donated to the [New York-Presbyterian](#), [Bring Change to Mind](#) and [Girls Inc.](#) who reported a higher need for mental health services and resources particularly in the wake of school closures ([see story](#)).

To keep morale high, Saks shared its love for its hometown by changing its windows and kicking off an elaborate campaign honoring the chutzpah of New York. In October, the windows at its flagship Fifth Avenue store featured a creative panorama by New York artist Timothy Goodman, offering solidarity to New Yorkers amid the pandemic.

The display was one element of a larger drive to raise funds for those affected by COVID-19 ([see story](#)).

First runner's-up: Net-A-Porter

The pandemic completely shifted the way retailers operated business, challenging many companies to think creatively to simply survive and *Luxury Daily* recognizes Net-A-Porter's successes this year. After being forced to suspend operations due to a shut down of its warehouses, Net-A-Porter successfully found a way to reopen for business using a delayed fulfillment method ([see story](#)).

In a philanthropic effort, Yoox Net-A-Porter Group (YNAP), which owns Net-A-Porter and Mr Porter, donated its Premier Delivery Service fleet to [God's Love We Deliver](#) for the nonprofit's emergency shelf-stable meal drive that took place April 17-19. This marked the third phase of YNAP's Volunteered Vehicles initiative that supports charities local to the Richemont-owned retailer's premier delivery markets which deliver essential supplies to socially isolated communities ([see story](#)).

Net-A-Porter and Mr Porter also partnered with Watches & Wonders to bring luxury watch brands directly to consumers, as Swiss watchmakers continue to make up for lost time in the digital arena ([see story](#)). The retailer also unveiled a lifestyle hub as it looks to capitalize on affluent's desire to nest amid the lingering pandemic ([see story](#)).



Net-A-Porter has partnered with The Prince's Foundation to launch a sustainable capsule collection as part of The Modern Artisan project. Image courtesy of YNAP

In September, Net-A-Porter announced the emerging brands joining The Vanguard mentorship program for the upcoming fall/winter season, as talent showcases become increasingly essential for fashion platforms to reach new customers. With a spotlight on sustainable brands, the designers behind Artclub, JiaJia and MinjuKim will receive guidance about the fashion business from Net-A-Porter's global team of specialists ([see story](#)).

Net-A-Porter owner YNAP also partnered with [The Prince's Foundation](#), the educational charity established by the Prince of Wales, to launch a sustainable capsule collection as part of The Modern Artisan project. The participants were students and recent graduates from the United Kingdom and Italy, and were chosen by the Politecnico di Milano and The Prince's Foundation ([see story](#)).

At the end of 2020, Net-A-Porter launched its own Instagram AR filter to foster communication and raise charity money in time for the holidays. Starting Nov. 30, visitors to Net-A-Porter's Instagram profile were able to exchange messages with loved ones and publicize greetings via social media thanks to a new AR filter.

Every time the filter was shared on social media using the #HomefortheHolidays hashtag and a @Net-A-Porter tag, the retailer donated 1 pound to its partner [Women for Women](#) until Christmas Day ([see story](#)).

Second runner's-up: Selfridges

Luxury Daily also recognizes Selfridges exceptional push toward sustainability in the retail sector. In July, the British department store chain added a designer touch to the face coverings that its employees would soon be required to wear.

As all team members were required to wear face coverings while working in-store as of July 24, the retailer partnered with [Bags of Ethics](#) to create stylish and sustainable face coverings for all employees ([see story](#)).

In the last 10 years, Selfridges has implemented a range of strategies centered around sustainability concerns. In August, the retailer announced its "Project Earth" initiative.

Through "Project Earth," Selfridges hopes to change how shopping is done by 2025 by focusing on environmentally-impactful materials and circular retail models. The project is also guided by Selfridge's commitment to science-based targets and achieving net-zero carbon by 2050, under the guidelines of the Paris Agreement.

With Project Earth, Selfridges is addressing sustainability through a broader, three-pronged approach: materials, models, mindsets ([see story](#)).

Although Selfridges is typically among the first retailers to kick off the holiday season with its Christmas shop opening as early as July most years, this year was much different due to the global health crisis. The shop launched in October and spotlighted sustainability as half of the products in the shop, including decorations, cards and wrapping paper, have at least one sustainable attribute.

This was the largest sustainable collection the retailer has offered for the holidays ([see story](#)).

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