

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Why Gucci is doubling down on marketing sustainability

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Gucci celebrates adventure in new collaboration with The North Face. Image courtesy of Gucci

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Italian fashion label Gucci is setting itself apart from the biggest luxury brands by consistently placing sustainability at the forefront of its marketing efforts.

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Gucci, with the backing of parent company Kering, has ramped up its environmental focus through a series of new collaborations and campaigns. These moves have helped the brand resonate with younger affluents, who consider themselves more values-driven than older generations, but transparency remains essential.

"The current sustainability crises luxury fashion brands are facing have only amplified broader cultural shifts, and a move towards more conscious luxury where sustainability is in itself aspirational," said Melissa Jackson-Parsey, chief strategy officer at creative agency **B-Reel**, New York. "As such, hopefully this is just the beginning for Gucci, as part of a more systemic overhaul of their sustainability practices, because if it is just marketing or a collection, it will be sniffed out by customers."

Going green

Before Gucci, luxury labels including Stella McCartney and Gabriela Hearst have made sustainability a core tenant. Kering's rival luxury conglomerate, LVMH, has relationships with both brands.

What makes Gucci's shift towards sustainability notable, however, is its position as one of the top brands in luxury.

Founded in 1921, the Italian fashion brand is a standout in Kering's portfolio, and its marketing reaches millions of consumers. Gucci has 42.4 million followers on Instagram alone, compared to Stella McCartney's 6.4 million followers and Gabriela Hearst's 294 thousand followers.

"Luxury brands like Gucci historically have not been sustainable, with marketing messages showcasing a lifestyle private jets, yachts that has little to do with environmental concerns," said Mark Kapczynski, chief marketing officer at supply chain platform **Gooten**, New York. "But the market is changing.

"In order for Gucci to remain relevant to a younger demographic, it needs to evolve," he said.

To start 2021 with sustainability in mind, Gucci has dropped a new collaboration with outdoor recreation brand The North Face. For its part, The North Face has an eco-friendly reputation, incorporating recycled materials and refurbished apparel into its brand strategy.

Gucci gets outdoorsy with The North Face

To promote the new limited collection, which is being rolled out throughout the month of January, Gucci commissioned artist Sean Vegezzi to explore the idea of literal and metaphorical adventures through film. In the theme with the collection campaign, the short documentary film pays tribute to the spirit of exploration ([see story](#)).

The collection is in line with the commitments from both brands to eco-sustainable activities. For instance, the luggage contains Econyl, a nylon fabric sourced from regenerated materials that can be recycled and recreated, aiding in decreasing its ecological footprint ([see story](#)).

This is not the first time Gucci has experimented with more sustainable materials.

Last June, the brand debuted Gucci Off The Grid, its first collection from Gucci Circular Lines that is made out of sustainable materials. The apparel and accessories were created using recycled, organic, bio-based and sustainably-sourced materials ([see story](#)).



Rapper Lil Nas X in the Gucci Off The Grid campaign. Image courtesy of Gucci

"It's not enough to just have a sustainable collection," Ms. Jackson-Parsey said. "Every aspect of the supply chain needs to reflect the same values, as well as looking at the resale market as a valid and necessary part of their product's lifecycle.

"This could even include marketing," she said. "It would be interesting for Gucci to create the most sustainable advertising, in line with its Off the Grid' messaging."

Gucci has made other recent moves that support its sustainable strategy.

The label also worked with resale platform The RealReal to set up an online shop featuring pre-owned Gucci pieces from past collections through the end of 2020 ([see story](#)).

Ahead of the holiday season, Gucci introduced new more sustainable packaging as well. The paper and cardboard are uncoated to ensure full recyclability, the shopping bag handles are made of recycled polyester and do not use glues among other design decisions to reduce environmental impact ([see story](#)).

Gucci has committed to carbon neutrality ([see story](#)) and is making strides to clean up its viscose supply chain ([see story](#)).

In other ways, however, Gucci still trails some of its peers. For instance, it continues to sell handbags made with exotic animal skins including ostrich and crocodile alongside handbags made with Econyl.

"Sustainability that is just a marketing campaign will backfire," Mr. Kapczynski said. "It needs to be built into the supply chain."

Changing values

Gucci's public embrace comes as recent events have accelerated consumers' awareness of environmental and social causes.

"Climate concerns, the COVID-19 pandemic and other global issues have created a generation of increasingly eco-conscious consumers," said Maria Haggerty, founder and CEO of [Dotcom Distribution](#), Edison, N.J.

According to a recent report from Deloitte, millennials and Generation Z, who are expected to account for approximately half of all global personal luxury goods sales by 2025, have already adopted social and environmental issues as fundamental and essential principles in their purchasing behavior. They are outlining new rules of the luxury market and brands are recognizing that sustainability is the ultimate goal ([see story](#)).

Similarly, panelists at the FT Business of Luxury Summit on Nov. 24 discussed how the luxury sector's impact on the environment is worsening, despite initial efforts on behalf of companies and their supply chains. Industry leaders examined what true sustainability looks like and how businesses and consumers can work to achieve it.

Panelists encouraged brands and consumers to move away from the vague language surrounding sustainability and actually investigate how companies are trying to reduce impact and find out where those reductions are happening. Instead of labeling everything as sustainable for the sake of credibility, companies should disclose what they are really doing to drive down emissions, water use, chemistry management and increase the livelihood of communities ([see story](#)).

"What's been made quite clear is that it is incumbent upon brands to lead by example with more sustainable options, and by communicating the impact of those efforts to consumers, foremost to the benefit of the planet, but also to their customers and their business," Ms. Haggerty said.

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