

MARKETING

How gamification can help luxury brands offer immersive experiences

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Gucci is one of the brands that has most eagerly embraced gaming. Image credit: Gucci

By SARAH RAMIREZ

While luxury brands may have initially been hesitant about experimenting with gaming and virtual influencers, these avenues offer marketers a way to build and maintain relevance with younger consumers.

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During the [Technology in Luxury Conference](#) on March 31, panelists spoke about the risks and opportunities for brands exploring the gaming space. With more consumers around the world identifying as gamers, luxury brands have an opportunity to engage with a large, captive audience.

"Luxury and heritage brands are trying to maintain a relevance with younger consumers," said Karina Nobbs, co-CEO at digital fashion marketplace [The Dematerialised](#), London. "There needs to be stickier longevity to the reasons that consumers would interact with a brand."

The event was hosted by Luxury Briefing. Tim Jackson, director of the British School of Fashion, moderated the panel.

Gaming connections

While there is the perception that luxury has been disconnected from the gaming world, some see more similarities than differences between the two cultural touchstones.

"Fashion brands particularly attract unbelievable global loyalty, and the same is definitely true of the gaming industry," said Jonathan Chippindale, CEO at digital retail agency [Holiton](#), London. "People plan around the game, and they're not just advocates they're disciples."

"Many games offer people escapism, which again is very much like luxury and fashion," he said.

Brands like Louis Vuitton and Prada were relatively early adopters to gaming, while Burberry and Gucci are currently the luxury labels most consistently engaging with the medium.



Louis Vuitton skin for the League of Legends game. Image credit: Riot Games

Ms. Nobbs categorized disparate approaches to digital fashion, differentiating between garments that can be experienced physically or digitally and physical or digital environments in which consumers can engage with garments.

She believes that game skins, which change the appearance of characters in video games, as a low-risk experimentation for brands. Ms. Nobbs thought brands were overlooking augmented reality (AR) experiences on smartphones until the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated brand adoption.

While luxury fashion labels have become accustomed to strongly controlling their narrative and quickly moving onto the next trend, Mr. Chippindale encourages brands to change their approach. As technology and digital media have democratized fashion, he believes brands should be patient when using new technology with the understanding that it takes years of development for these tools to truly hit their stride and become widely used.

As consumers become fickle and jump between more channels, luxury brands will have to work to reach audiences across as many channels as possible a change from when most heritage labels avoided mass advertising on television or out-of-home. Mr. Chippindale believes it is only a matter of time before consumers actively seek out opportunities to acquire products through gaming channels.

The popularity of virtual influencers such as Lil Miquela and Noonnoori also indicates there is already an interest in seeing avatars wear digital apparel. Mr. Jackson cited a report showing that virtual influencers see higher engagement rates on Instagram than their human counterparts.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by noonnoori (@noonnoori)

Noonoori wearing Valentino

Then there is the exponential growth and awareness of NFT ([see story](#)), another sign that consumers are becoming more comfortable with digital assets and investments.

"The laws of economics work quite similarly in the digital world as they do in the physical world," Ms. Nobbs said. "So limit supply, demand increases it's classic."

Next steps

AR, which has its roots in gaming, will likely continue to gain traction in a post-COVID world.

In February 2020, Burberry debuted an augmented reality shopping tool through Google Search technology to allow consumers to imagine the British fashion label's products around them.

The AR tool allowed shoppers to experience Burberry products embedded in the environment around them, aiding their product discovery and shopping process online and through mobile devices ([see story](#)).

Italian fashion label Valentino is also leaning on interactive campaigns to engage with digital-first consumers.

Valentino Insights is an interactive digital environment that brings a new perspective to the brand through architecture and design, inviting consumers to understand the lifestyle of creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli through immersive virtual reality technology. With this single-player-style exploration program, Valentino aims to bring its consumers closer to its products and heritage.

The brand also launched a VG Roman Stud filter on Instagram, which places a larger-than-life Roman Stud bag in the user's image frame. The purpose of this campaign was to "follow the bags" as they led consumers to the Valentino Insights experience ([see story](#)).

"I think that's healthy for brands to have that experimentation to figure out what's going to be right for their customers," Ms. Nobbs said.