

JEWELRY

Younger jewelry consumers refocusing on craftsmanship, quality

July 2, 2021



Jewelers have had to quickly pivot to ecommerce. Image credit: De Beers

By SARAH RAMIREZ

As luxury jewelers look to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization and sustainability are key to engaging with a younger generation of consumers.

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During a webinar hosted by brand performance cloud platform [Launchmetrics](#) on June 29, experts from the jewelry industry discussed how the pandemic accelerated existing trends. Digitalization had already been increasingly influencing the luxury jewelry sector, and new buying habits have emerged as well.

"COVID created this fundamental shift in the world as we all know it and it was very profound," said Sally Morrison, director of PR for natural diamonds at [De Beers Group](#), New York. "I think that what COVID did was probably intensify and accelerate things that were happening anywhere in the business."

Online pivot

Luxury jewelry brands have sped up their move online, influenced by how consumers' buying habits have changed.

More consumers are starting their research online and arriving at physical stores armed with more information. As a result, jewelers have focused on improving website experiences, adding depth and making sites more easily browsable and searchable, according to Ms. Morrison.



Diamond jewelry is popular for sentimental gifts. Image credit: Natural Diamond Council

"People pivoted to online both consumers and retailers in a big, big way because they had to," said Laurie Brookins, a New York-based freelance journalist specializing in the jewelry industry. "It's opened up a lot of opportunities again for consumers and retailers alike to understand that the online experience can be just as valuable as the in-person experience."

In addition to digitalization, jewelers have seen growth in self-purchasing led by affluent consumers in China and a more deliberate and purposeful "buy less, buy better" mentality.

To better understand how consumer perspectives and behaviors have rapidly changed, De Beers Group has been conducting weekly surveys of U.S. consumers during COVID-19.

"Half the people we talked to said they wanted fewer, better things, and that was I think really good news for jewelry," Ms. Morrison said. "Jewelry is not like fast fashion; it is not disposable it is something to keep."

Other findings showed that there is increased interest in purchasing sentimental or meaningful gifts, such as fine jewelry, particularly as consumers are more focused on their relationships and spending more time with romantic partners ([see story](#)).

The idea behind heritage pieces is also modernizing, with younger consumers finding appreciation in vintage pieces as well as custom designing pieces with the intent of passing on the jewelry to the next generation. As part of this shift, brands and consumers alike are refocusing on craftsmanship and quality.



Jennie Kwon is jewelry designers that collaborated on the De Beers Reset Collective project. Image credit: De Beers Group

"Younger consumers, they want to hear those stories about craft, heritage, tradition," Ms. Brookins said. "They want to understand where the pieces have come from."

"I think that retailers and designers would be very smart to offer plenty of education about sourcing, about stone cutting and how a piece went from concept to completion and what those steps were," she said. "People want to understand those things."

Spotlight on sustainability

For younger consumers, craftsmanship also goes hand in hand with sustainability.

"It's impossible to have a jewelry conversation these days without bringing up the word sustainability," Ms. Brookins said. "We have seen it permeate every single corner of the jewelry industry at this point."

"It starts with the resourcing of stones and responsible sourcing on through to making sure that your packaging is now made of recycled materials," she said. "It is literally an A-to-Z prospect that every jewelry company must be engaging in at this point."

For instance, U.S. jeweler Tiffany & Co. has touted the importance of sustainability and traceability in several efforts that aim to inspire and educate consumers.

In "The Journey of a Tiffany Diamond," the jeweler shares details of its diamond source initiative in an animated film ([see story](#)). In a followup series, Tiffany & Co. spotlighted individual employees and consumers as it followed a diamond from Cambodia to Belgium and finally New York ([see story](#)).

De Beers Group also launched a project in the hopes to educate consumers about responsible sourcing and sustainability within the industry.

"Reset" is a series of collaborations between De Beers Group and emerging jewelry designers to spotlight the positive impact of the natural diamond industry. The first initiative was Reset Collective, which features new works from five designers ([see story](#)).

Last year, the diamond company also officially announced a list of 12 sustainability goals it plans to achieve by the year 2030. Over the next decade, De Beers plans to work towards gender equality throughout its workforce, supporting women entrepreneurs and becoming carbon neutral ([see story](#)).

"For us, sustainability is about protecting the natural world, but it's also about ethical business practices," De Beers' Ms. Morrison said. "Sustainability is making sure that those communities where we're taking their precious resource and sending it out into the world and making sure it has the best possible outcome long-term for those communities."