

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

## Hennessy, NBA make moves for lasting global impact

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*Russell Westbrook hopes to inspire people from underserved communities through basketball and fashion. Image credit: Hennessy*

By NORA HOWE

LVMH-owned Cognac brand Hennessy is taking its relationship with the American National Basketball Association (NBA) to new heights, in an effort to engage global communities and create lasting impact.

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As part of its commitment to supporting small businesses through its Unfinished Business program, Hennessy and the NBA have unveiled a series of short films as part of its ongoing "Make Moves that Start Movements" effort. The campaign features influential individuals in the basketball community, including NBA All-Star Russell Westbrook, "Literally Balling" artist Victor Solomon and community activist Alex Taylor.

"The financial resources available amid the public health crisis, such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) have historically prioritized larger businesses, putting minority-owned small businesses at a disadvantage," said Jasmin Allen, senior vice president of **Hennessy U.S.**, New York.

"Rebuilding Black, Latinx and Asian American businesses is essential to an equitable recovery from COVID-19 and a more just economic and social future for communities of color."

### Making moves

Released through Hennessy's social media channels, the "Make Moves that Start Movements" campaign launched with a spotlight on Mr. Westbrook.

In 2016, the nine-time NBA All-Star and Southern California native established his apparel brand, Honor The Gift, inspired by his own childhood and founded on the concept of working towards greatness in spite of life's obstacles.

Honor The Gift is a streetwear brand built out of respect for the inner city and underserved communities.

As the founder and creative director of the brand, Mr. Westbrook aims to inspire people from all communities through fashion.

"It is important that people use their gift to do whatever they put their minds to," he says in the film.

*Russell Westbrook's apparel brand, Honor the Gift, is aimed at reaching underserved communities*

"Russell Westbrook is the quintessential representation of our 'never stop, never settle' ethos, as demonstrated by his incredible career progression on the court, but also because of his off-court voice that instills his relentless drive in others, making him the perfect fit for this campaign," Ms. Allen said. "Working with him has been an absolute pleasure and his approach is intrinsically collaborative."

In addition to providing original memorabilia, Mr. Westbrook will make a donation to Hennessy's Unfinished Business initiative.

The program is dedicated to providing immediate relief and long-term support to Black, Asian and Latinx small-business owners across the United States.

These business owners have had to overcome great obstacles in their paths to success and during the era of COVID-19, they are fighting harder than ever against a range of inequalities that stand in their way.

"BIPOC communities make up our core constituency therefore in response to COVID-19, Hennessy conceptualized Unfinished Business to support Black, Latinx and Asian American communities who were bearing a disproportionate amount of the health, emotional, and economic consequences of the pandemic, as well as not receiving help from government and banking institutions," Ms. Allen said.

Through the Unfinished Business initiative, these businesses have the opportunity to receive urgent funding and access to vital resources ([see story](#)).

In 2018, Alex Taylor founded Hoop York City, a women's basketball community with a mission to close the gender "play" gap by creating more opportunities for women in NYC to play basketball, connect and community-build.

Ms. Taylor was inspired by the challenges women face to fight for space and equality within the world of basketball. Hoop York City aims to provide safe spaces for women to play the game, engage in healthy competition and make meaningful connections.

Additionally, the organization wants to use basketball and art as catalysts for change to inspire new generations of activists.

"It's creating an opportunity for women to come as they are, and be themselves without judgement," Ms. Taylor says in her Hennessy spot. "My main purpose is to provide a community for them."

*Alex Taylor hopes to provide a safe space for women to enjoy basketball*

Artist Victor Solomon founded his art studio, "Literally Balling," as an ongoing exploration of the sport of basketball.

"From the film director to talent, our creative features powerful luminaries who are creating new waves and starting new conversations, like Victor Solomon, who's crafting a Kingsugi-style project in his LA studio," Ms. Allen said.

Through various mediums and processes, he aims to elevate the sport through opulence and luxury, crafting art to celebrate the impact of the game.

"I'm trying to build layers of meaning into each piece, showing people that basketball can be a platform for communities to come together" he says in his 30-second Hennessy spot. "It belongs everywhere, and to everyone."

Luxury and basketball

One of the most-watched sports leagues in the United States, the NBA has expanded its global presence. The league had been playing more international exhibition games prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has welcomed a new generation of rising stars from countries such as Slovenia, Serbia, Cameroon and Australia.

In February 2020, Hennessy signed a multiyear deal with the NBA to become the official spirit of the league and its affiliate franchises ([see story](#)), and since then the partnership has elevated basketball to a global scale.

Luxury fashion and automotive brands have quickly acknowledged the rising popularity of the sport and its players, evidenced by a growing number of campaigns and ambassadorships.

In May, Swiss watchmaker Tag Heuer added American professional basketball player Jimmy Butler to its roster of talented athletic ambassadors. The Miami Heat forward embodies the brand's values of passion for action, high performance, mental strength and precision.

Tag Heuer accompanied Mr. Butler through the remainder of the season, and will continue to do so in future seasons ([see story](#)).

In June, German automaker Mercedes-Benz leveraged the charisma of American professional basketball player Klay Thompson to demonstrate the capabilities of its S-Class sedan.

The automaker released a series of short, fun films featuring Mr. Thompson, who uses his magnetic personality and candor to highlight the vehicle ([see story](#)).

"The NBA features many world-class athletes, and a devoted fanbase that supports them, who embody the value of pushing limits," Ms. Allen said. "We built the 'Make Moves that Start Movements' platform with the core NBA fan in mind: those who buy into the culture of the NBA both on and off the court.

"The NBA fan doesn't just think about basketball as a game, but instead sees it as a never-stopping cultural force that influences everything from fashion to social justice," she said. "The NBA is increasingly present in their lives."

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