

RESEARCH

## 78pc affluent consumers are on social media: Four Seasons Luxury Trend Report

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By RACHEL LAMB

The Four Seasons completed its inaugural Four Seasons Luxury Trend Report and is using the findings to analyze how affluent consumers are using digital media and how the brand can better aid them while they are staying at its properties.

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**Luxury Daily**

Approximately 78 percent of affluent consumers are on social networks, with approximately 65 percent of whom believe that brands that have no presence on these media outlets are out of touch. In general, luxury consumers are back and ready to spend and are using digital media such as social media, ecommerce and mobile to interact with brands and make transactions.

“It is surprising how actively the luxury consumer has embraced online and particularly social media,” said Susan Helstab, executive vice president of marketing for the Four Seasons, Toronto. “We’ve been following the luxury traveler [especially] since the [economic] downturn and we’ve been doing more research because it was very clear that there were some fundamental changes in the luxury marketplace.

“[Our views of] marketing and customer engagement, in general, is that we need to have

a very holistic and integrated approach to marketing,” she said. “You have to make sure that the message alignment is consistent across all media, particularly in social media, to make sure that there is coherence and that brand values are represented in the right way.

“Don’t be afraid to use social media.”

### Social butterfly

The way to manage social media most effectively is by providing the kind of content, tools and assets that people will want to share or with which to engage.

However, this involves facilitating conversations as opposed to leading conversations, according to Ms. Helstab.

“Luxury [marketers] need to feel confident that their brands will stand up to this kind of level of scrutiny,” Ms. Helstab said. “If you deliver on your product promise in a way that exceeds consumers’ expectations, then the dialogue that’s going to happen will be natural.

“It’s okay to relinquish control of that conversation to the consumer,” she said.

Of the affluent consumers on social media, more than half are using social media to connect with brands, according to the report.

Not only does social media help to keep consumers involved and entertained with luxury marketers, but it can serve as a monitor for customer service, satisfaction and confidence in real-time.

Four Seasons monitors social networks including Facebook and Twitter to check-in with guests and to see whether or not consumers are mentioning them while staying at a property.

For example, a guest joking on Twitter about the hotel’s turn-down music received a bottle of wine and a list of local radio stations from the manager.

The rise of the mobile, particularly tablets, was important to the brand. In fact, Four Seasons’ tablet-generated revenue grew 200 percent from 2010 to 2011.

Four Seasons employees use smartphones and tablets to interact with customers face-to-face. In addition, many guest rooms are equipped with iPads.

Mobile serves as an added form of customer service, per Ms. Halsteb.

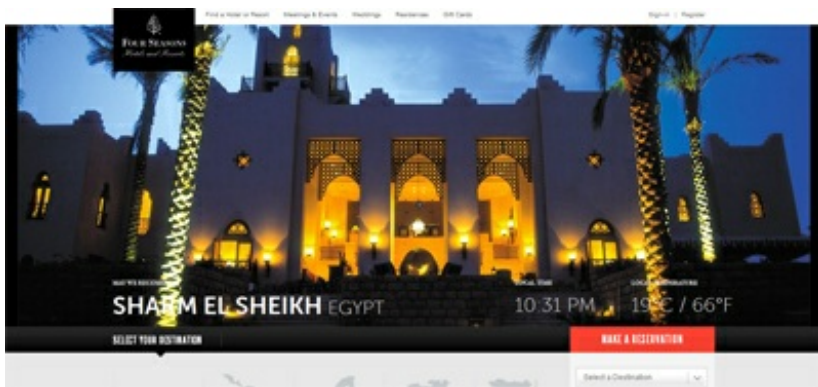
### Change in season

Another chief learning from the Four Seasons trend report is that ecommerce will continue to become one of the most lucrative channels for any luxury brand.

From just 2010 to 2011 alone, Four Seasons’ online bookings grew 10 percent, according to the report.

In light of this, Four Seasons recently revamped its Web site at

<http://www.fourseasons.com>.



### *New Four Seasons homepage*

The homepage entices purchase with large images of Four Seasons properties around the world.

The image includes the local time and temperature at the hotel and encourages consumers to make reservations then and there.

Trip advisories such as Yelp, ActiveHotels, TripAdvisor, Ctrip and Agoda are very important to affluent consumers. In fact, 33 percent of Four Seasons guests rate TripAdvisor “very to extremely influential.”

Knowing this, Four Seasons uses Revinate, an online review site that monitors guests’ reviews quickly and comprehensively.

“Commerce is important for all brands, and you want to provide the ability for someone to buy when they are in the mood to buy,” Ms. Halsteb said. “There is nothing more powerful than when you are in the mood to purchase and to be able to transact on the spot.

“[The study] helps us focus on our priorities and efforts and how we deploy overall marketing or communications budgets,” she said.

“We are spending more and more in the areas of digital and mobile because that’s where the future is.”

Final Take

*Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York*

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