

RESEARCH

Luxury marketers dramatically drop site loading times

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By RACHEL LAMB

Luxury marketers such as Rolls-Royce, Jaguar, Prada and Gucci have dramatically decreased the loading times on their Web pages in the fourth quarter of 2011, positioning themselves as tech-savvy and boosting availability for busy affluent consumers.

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In the third quarter, luxury marketers were still having trouble with site availability as well as reducing the amount of time that the sites were loading, which both hindered site performance and may have turned away impatient consumers. However, most of the brands in this study have moved away from Flash and content-heavy sites and are now focusing on platform-agnostic browsers such as HTML5.

“For the first time, four brands are at 100 percent availability and all of the brands have load times below four seconds,” said Gary Beerman, Coconut Creek, FL-based vice president of product management for AlertSite. “This is a continuing trend that they are getting better.

“The overall lesson is that everyone has learned the importance of Web site response time, including mobile sites, and they have dramatically improved their response and performance again from their numbers in the third quarter,” he said. “Luxury brands have really changed their face for consumers who utilize the Internet to research or buy

products.”

SmartBear checks the response times of luxury retailers and automakers every five minutes from 12 locations around the country.

Jaguar roars

The leaders of the automotive category in terms of availability were Rolls-Royce and Jaguar, both of which were 100 percent available all the time. This has never happened, according to Mr. Beerman.

Rolls-Royce took the top spot in terms of site response time with 0.169 seconds. Close followers were Porsche and Jaguar with 0.256 seconds and 0.26 seconds, respectively.



Jaguar site

The Web site that was the least available was Porsche, with 99.06 percent availability. The second-slowest was Maybach with 99.82 percent availability.

The two automakers who had the slowest response time were Ferrari and Infinity, whose response times took 4.585 seconds and 4.154 seconds to respond, respectively.



Ferrari site

However, automakers did very well overall.

For example, the last-ranking brand in the third quarter was Mercedes-Benz with 17.0322-second response time. In the fourth quarter, Mercedes jumped to 3.405 seconds.

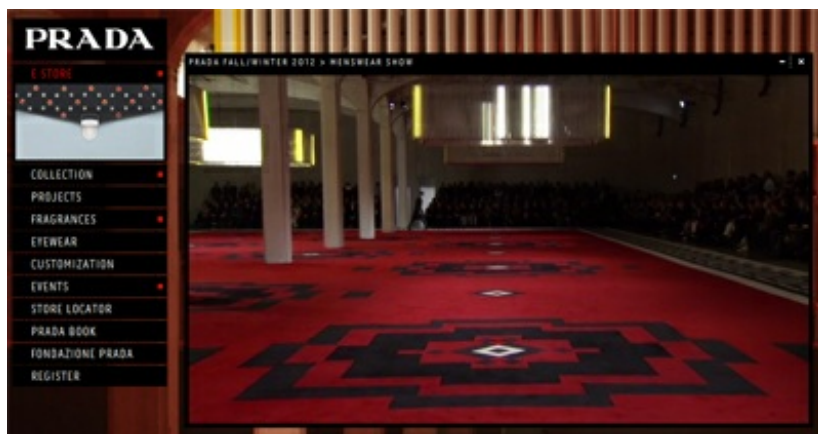
The average for automakers in terms of availability was 99.86 percent and the median for response time was 1.781 seconds.

In the third quarter, the average availability was 99.7 percent and average response time was 5.0036 seconds.

Performance anxiety

Luxury retailers also did quite well in terms of response time and availability in the fourth quarter.

The most-available brands were Prada and Gucci, both with 100 percent accuracy. Similar to the results of the automakers, complete availability has never happened before, per AlertSite.

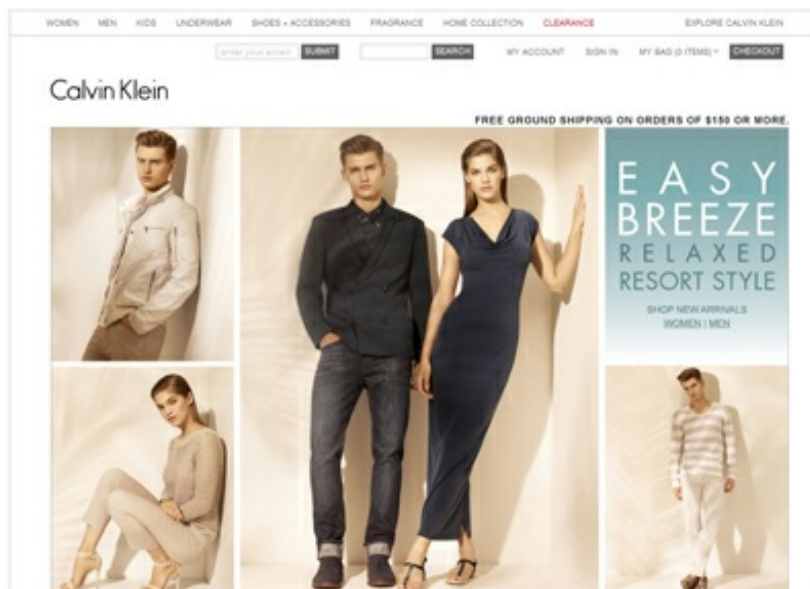


Prada Web site

In terms of page load time performance, Prada was at the top of the pack with 0.17 seconds, followed by Cartier at 0.244 seconds.

The least-available luxury retailers were Calvin Klein and Christian Dior with 98.68 percent and 98.72 percent availability, respectively.

Furthermore, the brands with the least-responsive load times were Calvin Klein and Burberry with the former having a 3.742 second load time and the latter having a 3.548 second load time.



Calvin Klein site

However, some of the retailers improved greatly from the third quarter.

For example, the lowest-ranking brand for page load time in the third quarter, Hugo Boss, boasted a difference from 5.7355 seconds to 0.658-second load time in the fourth quarter.

The average luxury retailer site availability dropped to 99.71 percent availability in the fourth quarter from 99.77 percent availability in the third quarter.

Furthermore, the average site load time went from 2.6281 seconds to 1.321 seconds in the fourth quarter.

The industry standard is that a brand's Web site has to load within four seconds, or the probability that the consumers will leave the page is quite high, according to Mr. Beerman.

Site availability and response time are actually intertwined.

Low availability is sometimes attributed to slow response time and if a site did not load within 60 seconds, it was deemed unavailable.

Based on this alone, luxury marketers are definitely improving.

Now that brands have mastered availability and page load on desktop computers, it is time for them to bring these practices into mobile, which AlertSite has already started to monitor, per Mr. Beerman.

"These brands also need to have a level of sophistication on mobile sites, since more people are using tablet-based devices when online shopping," Mr. Beerman said. "Many brands are starting to quicken their pages by going to HTML5."

"Luxury shoppers are perceived as an older generation, but now a younger generation is moving in that does expect this level of sophistication," he said. "Moving from Flash to HTML5 will help to improve site performance and will help the pages to be more universal between multiple devices."

Final Take

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