

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Tapping into tech solutions, Gucci enhances in-store accessibility

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Disability activist Sinad Burke is at the forefront of the brand's equity-minded effort. Image credit: Gucci

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

Italian fashion house Gucci is expanding a standing partnership rooted in equity for all.

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The brand is setting its sights on elevated levels of inclusion, bringing live, human-to-human interpretation service [Aira](#) – the app offers assistance to blind and visually impaired individuals – to new retail locations across the United States and Canada. Alongside the update, Gucci is documenting the importance of making the in-store experience engaging to all types of consumers in light of Disability Pride Month.

"What's unique about Gucci's partnership with Aira is it provides accessibility in luxury retail spaces, which has traditionally been overlooked," said Apryl Beverly, author of *Shots Fired: How to Write Copy That Pierces Hearts and Opens Wallets* and president of [BAAB Writing and Marketing Services](#), Atlanta.

"The advanced technology enables blind and low-vision people to independently experience Gucci's environment and products, not just view ads or e-commerce," Ms. Beverly said. "This level of in-person inclusivity is rare in the luxury and fashion world."

"Gucci making their physical stores and events accessible demonstrates a real commitment beyond just marketing, and is an exciting move that puts values into practice in their core business."

Ms. Beverly is not affiliated with Gucci, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Importance of inclusion

Using the consumer's smartphone for visuals, Aira provides shoppers with a description of their surroundings, as well as the products and people that may also inhabit the boutique during a given in-store session.

Free of charge, the app will come to more places across the nation, plus Canada, after the company learns more about consumer needs when it comes to accessibility in retail. After a pilot roll-out of Aira in Gucci's Beverly Hills and Miami Bal Harbour stores, the brand reveals that new North American installations are on the docket, starting with an additional 22 U.S. stores.

For now, clients are able to use Aira where available, as blind and low-vision customers are guided through physical spaces, allowing them to enjoy a bricks-and-mortar boutique session a bit more easily.

TITLE Sinad Burke _____.

Upon entering a participating Gucci store, Aira provides live, on-demand assistance.

With this support and the participation of on-site client advisors, low-vision and blind shoppers are given the chance to independently navigate Gucci.

Sinad Burke, founder and CEO of accessibility consultancy Tilting the Lens and member of the Global Equity Board at Gucci, ran the initial pilot programs. Using her experience and expertise, Ms. Burke's involvement is an example of the power of listening and shows the value of having diverse people in the room where decisions are made.

Thanks to her work, Gucci teams and staff are all getting upskilled, receiving training on the topic so that they can better help every customer, regardless of their level of bodily ableness.



Using the shopper's camera on their phone, Aira agents assist those who are blind or low-visioned, describing products, guiding the user to what they say they like and navigating them around the store. Image credit: Gucci

Altogether, the effort builds on the luxury fashion giant's current conscious commitments ([see story](#)) and bolsters representation ([see story](#)). By acknowledging the true range of backgrounds, bodies and abilities that make up its customer base, Gucci's strides are possibly financially beneficial as well.

"Embracing diversity and accessibility puts luxury brands in a great position to authentically connect with more consumers who want to see themselves represented," Ms. Beverly said.

"It also amplifies a clear message that the brand is progressive and in touch with societal values, qualities that are vital for luxury brands today," she said. "Studies continue to show that inclusive marketing boosts consumer appeal, while marketing that excludes large demographics is outdated and often turns off many contemporary luxury consumers.

"An inclusive approach simply makes good business sense in our current landscape."

Luxury makes conscious commitments

As consumers as a whole increasingly express a desire for more mindful products, diverse representation and a reflection of their own values on the part of brands with which they shop ([see story](#)), more luxury names are obliging.

Automakers are fronting wheelchair development ([see story](#)), fashion conglomerates are making commitments to inclusion ([see story](#)) and publishers are at last recognizing the many ways in which their readers take in their stories ([see story](#)). Inclusive marketing experts and professionals are lauding the movement.

"Inclusivity is smart marketing for luxury brands because it expands their audience, refreshes their image, and it lets all of their consumers feel seen, heard, recognized and valued," Ms. Beverly said.

Gucci's tangible actions are celebrating the beauty of difference

Despite the leaps and bounds made in luxury lately as far as consciousness goes, there is still a long way to go due to blind spots, largely due to a lack of representation in decision-making spaces. However, there are solutions that can greatly boost accessibility.

"For in-store experiences, brands can implement accommodations, like what Gucci is doing with Aira, and train

staff on providing respectful, equitable service to all," Ms. Beverly said.

"They can also design, modify or retrofit spaces to improve physical accessibility, and share values publicly," she said. "For products, they should consider needs and make adaptive clothing, and adjustable or alternative options with universal designs that benefit everyone.

"The luxury industry still has work to do but partnerships like Gucci x Aira are a fantastic step, and if brands share accessibility values publicly, consult with experts and communities, set goals to drive progress and keep inclusivity top-of-mind across all touchpoints, positive change will continue to be brought."

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