

COLUMNS

The necessity of customer intimacy with today's luxury audience

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Daymon Bruck is chief creative officer and partner of The O Group. Image credit: The O Group

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When we think about customer intimacy, we are specifically referring to the brand practice of developing strategies, practices, content and experiences that enhance a consumer's relationship with the brand.

This branding approach is typically seen through the lens of traditional customer service or even CRM strategies, but boosting customer intimacy is a practice unique to itself and can be developed from the inside out, well before consumer engagement and interactions take place.

From building more emotional and authentic storytelling content to creating exclusive product offerings and experiences intended for a select clientele group, luxury brands have the ability to heighten this sense of connection, closeness and affinity with customers for a lifetime, not just over the course of a single transaction or the sharing of a social post.

As luxury branding consultants, we have been helping our clients build more successful approaches to deeper customer intimacy at every stage of the customer journey. Here are the top three areas of branding efforts that help our clients do just that.

Building Emotional Brand Connections from the Inside Out

A brand's personality and voice are developed to help build connections, a way to craft a consistent and constant presence that can deliver a persona to interact with. Similarly, brand storytelling is a powerful tool for luxury brands to demonstrate specific values, identity and beliefs with an intended audience.

By creating engaging narratives that showcase their brand's unique providence, artisanship, use of specialized materials and techniques and even how they utilize their social equity, luxury leaders have the potential to build an active community of emotionally connected and passionate customers who share their vision and values.

Patek Philippe, Burberry, Chanel, Rolex and Louis Vuitton are all masters of both unique brand persona development and compelling emotional storytelling.



Chanel boutique in Place Vendôme. Image credit: Getty Images

Creating deeper connections with customers starts with understanding your intended audience and building a brand personality and voice that will blend and balance with their intended goals and values. Historically, luxury brands have not adopted this mindset.

In traditional luxury (see story), the customer was drawn to an exclusive product or service because it was unique, rare and refined beyond any ordinary standard. Today's luxury market is much more crowded than in decades past resulting in more brands with similar offerings - this requires marketers to rely more on brand differentiators over the value of goods and services alone.

This increase in competitive offerings will only grow in years to come making the potential power of a brand's emotional connections more critical.

Creating Special Access Experiences and Exclusive Products

Limited access to exclusive products and services can be a part of many luxury brands marketing strategies. Sometimes, it is the entire business model (especially for a luxury start up).

Private fashion events, exclusive meet-and-greets for top clientele, exotic travel experiences and private dinners at locations money can't buy are becoming more common for luxury brands who understand the importance of showcasing their abilities to build customer intimacy.

The need for creating exclusive access and unique experiences is felt at every level of the luxury industry, but it plays a special role at the highest tiers, where money is never a barrier to entry but obtaining access to a limited experience can be.



VIPs enjoyed 5-star accommodations at The St. Regis Aspen Resort during Saks Aspen Limitless Weekend. Image courtesy of Saks

In March of 2023, Saks hosted an event in Aspen for their invite-only top client program, Saks Limitless, complete with exclusive events and merchandise. Their program focuses on cultivating access to experiences that money can't buy and working with designers to offer special merchandise to clients at events.

"We are excited to see Saks Limitless continue to grow as we deliver highly personalized service and access to once-in-a-lifetime experiences that money can't buy," said Mariel Sholem, vice president of client engagement at Saks, in a statement.

Enhancing the Entire Customer Journey

To create a personal, unique and memorable experience for customers, brands first need to understand their audiences (including values, drivers and desires) before a truly intimate interaction takes place.

Not unlike human relationships, to take the relationship to a deeper and more meaningful stage, you must first have a comprehensive understanding of the other in order to build a bond and develop trust. Ordinary customer service experiences, by contrast, are more standardized and less personalized.

Creating customer intimacy involves going beyond the standard expectations and creating a sense of connection, exclusivity and fantasy through the entire customer journey.

Each step of this journey, from becoming aware and learning about a brand as they enter a store or website to completing a purchase even outside of a typical transactional process, is an opportunity for brands to show up for customers and prove its leaders want an authentic relationship.



Creating customer intimacy involves going beyond the standard expectations to create a sense of connection, exclusivity and fantasy throughout the entire customer journey. Image credit: Getty Images

Many luxury brands are becoming more adept with developing their direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales and marketing channels, putting additional efforts into the unboxing experience of a customer journey. Mr.Porter.com is an excellent example of what to do when your brand relies 100 percent on an online DTC channel for sales but still needs to provide exceptional luxury service.

During the unboxing experience, Mr. Porter customers encounter personalized client name tags inside each garment bag, with wrapping inside their delivery and their own names being displayed at the top of the website when logged into an account. Mr. Porter has gone beyond expectations to create emotional connections with its customers, allowing them to feel a part of the entire brand experience, not just during a transaction.

Authentic Intimacy for a Lifelong Relationship

At the heart of customer intimacy is the concept of a relationship.

The dream for most luxury brands is to create a lifelong relationship with their customers - a continuation of authentic experiences that build loyalty, trust, desire and even dream fulfillment.

Like significant human relationships we develop over our lifetimes (romantic, familial, friends or colleagues), if one partner does not feel valued or understood, the likelihood of separation becomes high.

To flame the fire of desire and fantasy within ideal customer segments, luxury brands need to continually find ways to build and nurture that desire not just once, but again and again, creating a lifetime of intimacy, one worthy of luxury's rarefied prestige.

Part two of four from "The New Luxury Brand Playbook" by The O Group, a luxury brand consultancy located in NYC.