

COMMERCE

Marc Jacobs answers consumer calls with new ecommerce presence

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By KAITLYN BONNEVILLE

Fashion designer Marc Jacobs will jump onboard with other luxury brands and begin selling on its Web site this month, a good 10 years after many peers began the practice.

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After the recession caused the luxury goods industry to fall 8 percent last year, according to Bain & Co., brands such as Marc Jacobs were forced to make a decision. The question was whether or not to continue to turn the other cheek at online sales and the answer, for many, seemed obvious.

“I think it’s more the question of what took Marc Jacobs so long,” said Sucharita Mulpuru, vice president and principal analyst for retail ebusiness at [Forrester Research](#), Cambridge, MA.

“Companies like Gucci and Burberry have been selling online for awhile,” she said.

“[Yoox](#), [Net-A-Porter](#) and [GSI Commerce](#) have been the engine behind a lot of luxury sites for awhile now.

“Some companies like Prada don’t have time, or don’t care or don’t see the value of Web. That’s, of course, a mistaken perspective because everyone is online now.

“You have the ability to reach more shoppers with a commerce-functional Web site and it

provides a service for even your best shoppers. That's been proven over and over again."

Marked by Marc

Marc Jacobs first launched his self-named high-end line in 1986. The men's and women's ready-to-wear apparel and accessories collections and fragrances are sold globally to a trendy, younger demographic.

Upon visiting the homepage, which at this time has yet to launch its ecommerce section, the consumer is prompted to sign-up to watch both of Marc Jacobs' Spring 2011 fashion shows live online Sept. 13 – 14 during the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week.



Consumers can also browse through the Marc Jacobs and Marc by Marc Jacobs collections, special items or the World of Marc Jacobs section. By hovering over each category, it is broken down into unique sub-categories.

By selecting World of Marc, consumers can view the designer's biography, see photos from recent Marc Jacobs events and trips, watch footage from fashion shows and video interviews with featured employees.

The Find a Store option locates one of the Marc Jacobs shops worldwide. Marc Jacobs does not have a mobile site or application.

Winds behind the sales

Out of the top ten online activities, shopping falls in at No. 3 behind email and entertainment, according to a **Gartner Inc.** survey. Retailers and brands without commerce-enabled sites not only fall short, they inevitably die out.

"For some brands, it's taken so long because of the cost factor to enter the development arena," said Gene Alvarez, research vice president for CRM and ecommerce at Gartner, Stamford CT. "And for others, some of the luxury brands had only viewed the Web as a marketing channel and not as a sales channel."

The recession provided many brands with the final push onto the ecommerce field. Using the Web as a sales channel is cheaper than opening a new storefront, the success of which may or may not be guaranteed.

"The recession affected them because price is now king," Mr. Alvarez said. "The luxury brand shoppers still want their luxury brand, but they may not have their disposable income."

“Now they have those private sale sites,” he said. “They go out to save money but still have the things they like.”

Web-feat

Luxury buyers are also looking for the convenience that a Web site provides, such as a daily email guiding them to brands’ deals.



To maintain a luxury brand’s in-store experience on its Web site, it needs great photography, lookbooks and videos.

It is not entirely necessary, and is also quite impossible, to transfer the entire in-store experience to online. In general, sites that do this fail.

“To think that you need to have a site that is esoteric and difficult to use as a replica of your store is just short-sighted,” Forrester’s Ms. Mulpuru said.

According to Gartner’s Mr. Alvarez, balancing the in-store experience online is the key factor to a thriving luxury brand Web site.

“For luxury brands to be successful, they need to deliver a rich user experience through use of video, and follow best practices that have already been set by online retailers, like Amazon,” Mr. Alvarez said.

Some brands have failed with their sites because they either incorporate too much rich media, making the retail and store locator sectors hard to navigate, or because the site appears as a discounted model of the brand.

Though some brands have fallen short in recent years and others simply have refused to jump onboard, soon all luxury brands will follow the online or ecommerce trend.

“Over the next three to five years, you can expect the branded luxury manufacturer to invest more in the Web and the Web experience,” Mr. Alvarez said. “In three to five years, they will make sure that they are getting it right.

“It means that they better start putting money aside to invest in their Web channel,” he said.

Final Take

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