

IN-STORE

Harrods fine-tunes customer experience via employee etiquette lessons

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By RACHEL LAMB

British department store Harrods sent its employees to take etiquette lessons in a move likely to push its sales team to the forefront of customer service and experience when affluent shoppers visit.

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Luxury Daily

The retailer decided to send its employees from its luxury watches department to Minding Manners, a London-based etiquette and protocol consultancy. The employees took two full-day sessions that emphasized etiquette aspects of multi-cultural awareness.

“Teaching etiquette should be an important element for every organization, particularly in global cities like London where many of their clients come from other parts of the world,” said Chris Ramey, president of Affluent Insights, Miami.

“Too many luxury brands, particularly those that are not global, tend to believe by hiring nice or beautiful people that they need not train them,” he said. “Making the assumption that salespeople intuitively understand how to serve the affluent is remarkably short-sighted and will undermine any luxury brand.”

Mr. Ramey is not associated with Harrods or Minding Manners, but agreed to comment as

an industry expert.

Harrods did not respond before press deadline.

Watch and learn

Since Harrods has an extensive VIP clientele from the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the Americas, the training by Minding Manners covered all aspects of meeting, greeting and interacting with cross-cultural respect.

Harrods employees understood when to shake hands and when not to do so, eye contact and body language to avoid. They also learned the elements of collectivist relationship-building.



Minding Manners Web site

It used to be thought that every shopper entering stores should be greeted with a handshake and offered a glass of Champagne when trying on watches, but the sessions emphasized that not every culture appreciates a handshake, nor do they drink Champagne.

Harrods employees also learned that mixed-gender touches are not always welcome, and the Harrods team now better understands the value of understanding gender issues.

Knowing how to make their customers feel comfortable and well-respected is the most important component of the training.

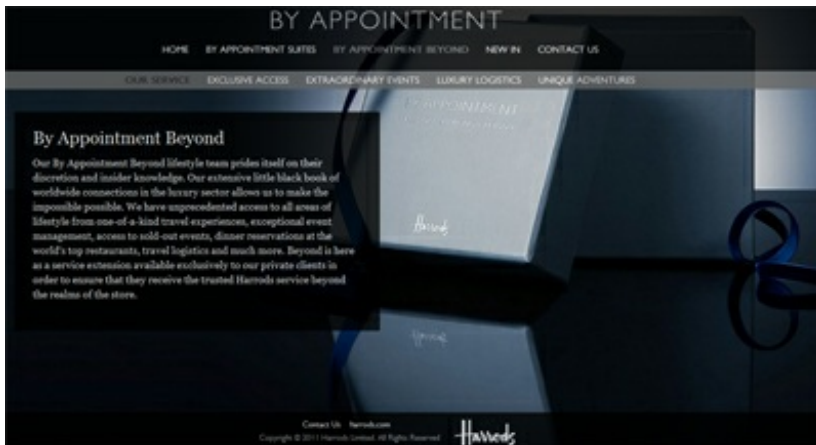
The partnership with Minding Manners enhanced the tools that Harrods already holds, further enabling the sales team to successfully navigate the territories of globalization where business relationships with an elite global clientele are more common than anywhere else in the world, according to Minding Manners.

Service with a smile

Harrods already excels at customer service.

In fact, its Harrods by Appointment – Beyond service was recently lauded at the Luxury Briefing awards.

Beyond is an extension of Harrods' service available to private clients and goes beyond the realms of what consumers expect from a department store, per Luxury Briefing.



Harrods by Appointment

In addition to typical experiences such as personal shopping, Beyond gives affluent consumers access to all lifestyle areas including sold-out events, travel experience, event management and reservations at top restaurants worldwide.

Harrods employees likely did not need lessons in etiquette, but it is doubtful that the extra training will harm the brand.

“Training allows Harrods’ employees to communicate with clients in the manner in which they expect and deserve,” Mr. Ramey said. “There is nothing more important than interfacing with clients.

“Training is the platform for ensuring it is done properly,” he said. “It is not as much as how clients will see Harrods, clients expect this level of service.

“It is more about respect, honor and meeting expectations.”

Final Take

Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

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