

COLUMNS

Luxury Unfiltered: Luxury's silent crisis and why client trust is the new scarcity

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By **Daniel Langer**

Luxury has always been built on trust.

For decades, clients placed their confidence in brands that promised excellence, craftsmanship and beauty. Today, trust has become the rarest luxury.

Prices are higher than ever, expectations are soaring, and yet too many encounters feel underwhelming, even ordinary.

Sameness is fatal

The result is a silent crisis. Trust is eroding across categories, and once it is gone, it rarely returns.

Many brands are seeing the concept come to life in declining revenue and profit numbers. I have the privilege to work with brands across practically all luxury categories in every major region in the world, giving me profound firsthand insights.

When my team and I evaluate luxury experiences across the world, I often notice the same contradiction: a boutique or showroom may display spectacular products with stratospheric prices, but the client interaction feels generic and transactional.

The storytelling is weak to non-existent, the personalization is often absent, and the entire atmosphere lacks emotion. In a market where even the most affluent clients can choose between dozens of brands, this sameness is fatal.

Importantly, heritage and product excellence are not enough. They can create credibility and desire, but they do not secure loyalty.

This is where my 4E of luxury framework becomes essential. Emotion, engagement, experience and exclusivity are the critical levers that build perceived value and create trust.

To unlock their power, each must be activated with precision at every touchpoint. When one is missing, clients feel it immediately.

Airlines and the 4E's

Trust erodes not because of one dramatic failure, but because of a pattern of underwhelming moments. Hence, the pressure is intensifying as millennials and Gen Z redefine the meaning of luxury.

They demand personalization that goes far beyond scripted greetings. They seek engagement that is authentic, experiences that create lasting positive memories, and exclusivity that feels personal and empathetic rather than manufactured.

They compare a luxury interaction not just with other luxury brands, but with the most seamless, client-centric services in their daily lives. Their point of view is further informed and amplified by influencers on Instagram or TikTok.

If luxury fails to deliver on its high expectations, it will turn away without hesitation.

Consider the airline industry. A flight in a premium cabin costs thousands of dollars, yet many airlines still treat their most loyal passengers in a totally transactional fashion.

An inconsistent lounge experience, a lack of recognition onboard, or indifferent service quickly undermines trust. In contrast, airlines that understand the psychology of their clients create rituals, personalization and recognition that elevate the journey into an experience of belonging.

Here, the 4E framework becomes a roadmap to differentiation. I just returned from a flight to Southeast Asia on Singapore Airlines and had the true pleasure of experiencing a choreographed service that was a positive standout experience.

Comparing that with most of my other overseas flight experiences on different airlines, what you get is often mediocracy disguised as first or business class.

The same applies in luxury fashion, beauty, hospitality and automotive, to name a few. It's what I call "luxury in ambition only."

Too many brands present themselves as interchangeable. The boutiques look similar, the hotel lobbies blend into one another, and the car dealerships operate with the same transactional model, best described as "the sea of sameness."

Clients are paying extreme prices for experiences that rarely feel extreme. The gap between price and perceived value is widening, and trust collapses in that gap.

Importantly, luxury always has to deliver extreme value. This requires a radically client-centric perspective.

Brands must build ecosystems of extreme value around their clients. Every interaction must feel intentional, personal, inspiring and differentiated.

This means shifting from a product-first mindset to a client-first model. It means investing in training that empowers teams to create emotional connections.

It means designing rituals and touchpoints that reinforce trust with every encounter. An audit of every client touchpoint is essential.

Inspiring desire

Brands must examine whether they truly engage emotionally, whether the experience feels extraordinary, whether exclusivity is delivered in a meaningful way, and whether the engagement builds long-term connection. Anything less creates friction, and friction kills trust.

Trust is the new scarcity. It cannot be copied, scaled or faked.

It must be earned with relentless consistency. Luxury brands that commit to creating ecosystems of extreme value have a significant opportunity to free themselves from the sea of sameness.

They will differentiate not only through products but through the totality of the client journey. Those who ignore this reality will find themselves losing relevance, one underwhelming interaction at a time.

To lead in times of trust scarcity, the luxury industry must reimagine itself through the lens of the client. Only then is there a chance to regain and build trust.

Only then will luxury continue to inspire desire in a world where clients hold all the power.

Luxury Unfiltered is a weekly column by *Daniel Langer*. He is the CEO of *quit*, a global luxury strategy and creative brand activation firm, where he is the advisor to some of the most iconic luxury brands. He is recognized as a global top-five luxury key opinion leader. He serves as the executive professor of luxury strategy and pricing at Pepperdine University in Malibu and as a professor of luxury at New York University, New York. Dr. Langer has authored best-selling books on luxury management in

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*Dr. Langer conducts masterclass management training on various luxury topics around the world. As a luxury expert featured on Bloomberg TV, Financial Times, The New York Times, Forbes, The Economist and others, Mr. Langer holds an MBA and a Ph.D. in luxury management and has received education from Harvard Business School. Follow him on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#), and listen to his **Future of Luxury Podcast**.*

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