

Trust is the new currency of luxury': Positive Luxury

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Consumers are turning to generative artificial intelligence to search for sustainable products and practices. Image credit: Positive Luxury

By KIRAN GILL

Nearly 60 percent of consumers distrust sustainability messaging until they see proof, according to new findings from Positive Luxury.

Per its latest report, "Luxury at a Crossroads: A Positive Luxury guide to engaging consumers and driving growth in 2026," clients want to prioritize sustainable purchases but, following a year marked by supply chain scandals and other ESG-related missteps, are more skeptical of broad-reaching sustainability promises from businesses than ever before. Especially amid a landscape of client consciousness and increased regulatory action, Positive Luxury believes greater trust, transparency and effective communications will guide the businesses that succeed in the coming year.

"After a decade shaped by global disruption, rising consumer expectations and increasing regulation, luxury brands enter 2026 facing a crossroads," said Amy Nelson-Bennett, chief executive officer of Positive Luxury, in a statement.

"Trust in brands, particularly around sustainability and the supply chain, has become fragile and in some cases damaged following scandals, greenwashing claims and regulatory enforcement," Ms. Nelson-Bennett said. "In 2026, luxury brands can no longer be judged by what they intend to do, but what they can prove they are already doing and how honestly and clearly they can explain it."

"Sustainability has to move from a specialist function into all aspects of an organization, from governance and procurement to product design and brand strategy."

Building trust

For the consumer of 2026, sustainability is an important value, and while many feel underwhelmed by the current offering of sustainable products and solutions, prospective shoppers are frequently utilizing generative artificial intelligence tools to make "better choices." Consumers are also eschewing social media in favor of real-world experiences while also prioritizing craftsmanship and heritage.

Concerning marketing, consumers are looking for straightforward language, preferring conversation over jargon-laden copy. As a result, cautious consumers want to see the data behind companies' claims.

"2026 will be the year when the language of sustainability finally grows up," said Martin Townsend, growth director of

Knowledge Solutions, BSI, in a statement.

"We've had years of targets, pledges, and polished ESG decks," Mr. Townsend said. "What's coming is a reckoning proof over promise."

In 2026, sustainability is more than just short-term results, it's about long term resilience. The reach of sustainability has expanded and now incorporates how businesses mitigate risk, manage supply chain issues and devise modern revenue streams.

"Sustainability is about business resilience and value creation," said Iris Van der Veken, executive director and secretary general of WJI 2030, in a statement.

"Gone are the days when it is just a nice-to-have; it needs to be integrated across all functions as part of the business strategy."



Digital product passports allow shoppers to access verified details about their garments from sourcing information to care and repair options.
Image credit: Positive Luxury

Businesses can cultivate trust with their consumers by adopting radical transparency. Brands must effectively communicate their sustainable practices with services such as digital passport products ([see story](#)) and easily-searchable sourcing data.

In the watches and fine jewelry sector, this will mean consumers can pinpoint the origins of the materials utilized in their pieces to a specific site in the world.

"Luxury consumers have made their expectations unmistakably clear: responsibility, transparency, creativity with conscience," said Ms. Nelson-Bennett, in a statement.

"They don't want lectures," she said. "They want proof and meaning."

"The brands that win the next decade will give them exactly that."

Business growth

Positive Luxury's report highlighting how clear communication builds trust with prospective consumers follows in the wake of research from global consulting firm Bain & Company detailing how business executives view sustainability initiatives as positive business growth opportunities rather than restrictive compliance mandates ([see story](#)).

"Brands that design resilient systems and create after-sales-driven revenue streams outperform during economic slowdowns because they're structurally built for longevity," said Hasna Kourda, founder and chief executive officer of Save Your Wardrobe, in a statement.

With an emphasis on sustainability, many luxury businesses are not only altering their business practices but also investing in emerging start-ups and long-term initiatives.

For example, earlier this month, beauty group L'Oral revealed the 13 startups in its inaugural "L'AcceleratOR" program, which has an endowment of more than \$100 million euros over five years ([see story](#)).



The company is hosting rewilding projects across Africa, Europe, Asia and South America. Image credit: Kering

Meanwhile, French luxury conglomerate Kering is helping farmers to implement regenerative agriculture practices in a move that will impact roughly 2.74 million acres of land ([see story](#)).

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