

INTERNET

Harrods retools ecommerce site with focus on editorial, personalization

June 13, 2012



By TRICIA CARR

London-based retailer Harrods is revamping its ecommerce site to feature a more interactive homepage with static scrolling, editorial content and curated items as well as a Favorites tool that lets users create a shopping list.



The retailer is looking to engage consumers with more content on its ecommerce site that helps them make purchasing decisions. In addition, registered users can create and save a shopping list of favorite items, which will appear first when browsing.

"Luxury retailers must be able to convey the feeling of luxury and the overall brand while still having a successful ecommerce business," said Vic Drabicky, a New York-based luxury and premium brand digital strategist.

"Many brands struggle with this notion, swinging way too far toward the brand side of things and delivering a poor user experience, or swinging too far in the sales direction and losing the brand feel," he said. "In this case, Harrods' unique homepage design does a good job of accomplishing both.

"It gives the consumer the normal, easy navigation they are used to on the top, but also gives consumers a rich brand experience by scrolling down and seeing greater

integration of content, which is a positive especially for higher-priced items where consumers may need a bit more information before purchasing."

Mr. Drabicky is not affiliated with Harrods, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

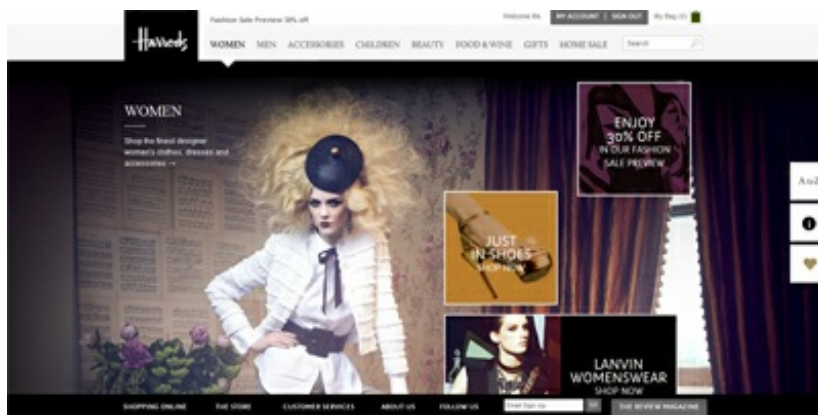
Harrods did not comment.

Harrods homepage

Harrods' Web site underwent an overall refreshment to enhance and refine the shopping experience, per the retailer.

New features include a parallax scrolling homepage, personalized product listings, integration of editorial content from its The Review online magazine and a shopping list tool.

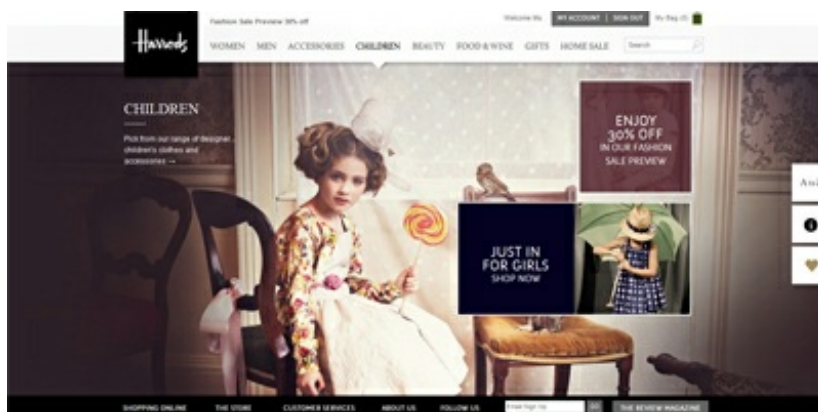
The updated homepage of Harrods.com showcases each section of the site with images that can be viewed by scrolling up and down. A static toolbar remains at the top, bottom and right side of the screen.



Harrods.com

As users scroll down the homepage, the arrow at the top of the screen also moves to the section shown. Users can click on the top toolbar at any time to view all browsing subsections or click on a section at the top to be brought to that image on the homepage.

Harrods is presenting squares on its homepage that share news about sales, collections, editorial content and curated items. The background image represents each section.



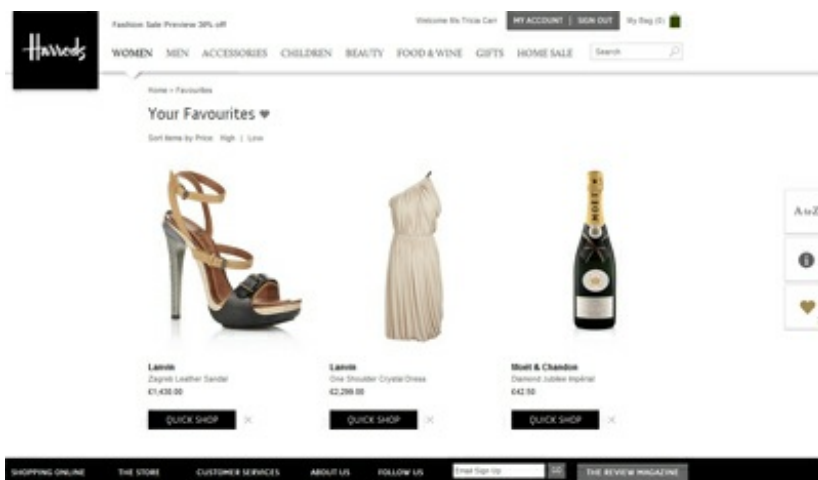
Children section of the homepage

For example, the Women section is the first section and shows three squares arranged

haphazardly off to the right of the screen that announce a sale preview, a new shoe collection and the new Lanvin collection.

The new toolbar that consistently stays at the right side of the screen while a user browses the site contains buttons to navigate to a specific brand's section, contact customer service and go to a user's Favorites page.

While shopping, registered users can click on the heart-shaped icon next to a product to add it to their Favorites shopping list, which can be viewed by clicking on the heart icon on the toolbar on the right side of any Harrods.com page.



Favorites

Harrods is personalizing browsing by listing favorite items first on a shopping page, if there are any favorite products chosen from that section.

"The new site features added value to Harrods because they make it more dynamic, fun to use and easier to navigate," said Adriana Estrada, account director at **Siegel+Gale**, New York. "The online experience today needs to be exciting as well as personalized.

"The Favorites function lets users create their own wish lists without the pressure to buy at that moment," she said. "It is the digital experience of marking the pages of a fashion magazine for things that you want to look for in stores, now or later.

"The goal is to engage customers by bringing them into an exciting space where they can easily find what they like and actually do something with the products."

Meanwhile, the mobile view of the Web site is not as seamless. Instead of the static browsing, all of the homepage images load one after the other and users must scroll through a large page to view all content.

Time for a makeover

Luxury brands seem to be popping up with new Web sites that focus more on content and personalization.

For example, French fashion house Christian Dior redesigned its Web site to show the lifestyle behind the brand via images and videos that will likely increase time spent on the site, but the label did not add ecommerce capabilities beyond beauty products (**see story**).

In addition, Barneys New York created a social setting on its ecommerce site where consumers can make shopping lists, share favorites and shop user-recommended products, a move likely to distinguish the retailer from its competitors.

Barneys redesigned its ecommerce site to include a personalized shopping experience and engaging social channel that could give the retailer an edge over competitors such as Bergdorf Goodman and Neiman Marcus ([see story](#)).

The updates to the Harrods Web site are part of its soft launch. The site will be updated more frequently and Harrods will be marketing the site with a larger push when the fall/winter 2012 collections are out, per the retailer.

A soft launch could spark consumers' interest to come back and experience the site when the fall collections are released, which is the biggest time for retailers, per Ms. Estrada.

"Summer is a great time to soft launch an upgraded Web site because of two big things happening in the retail world – summer sales and fall previews," Ms. Estrada said.

"Consumers are very accustomed to shopping online, especially when sales are on, so it is a fantastic time to showcase the new site"

By slowly rolling out its new features, Harrods is letting consumers get used to the site. This is a smart move so that all consumers, including traditional consumers that might not prefer the online shopping experience, can adapt to the change.

"Now is a great time to relaunch a site especially if you are in retail," Mr. Drabicky said.

"We are in the shoulder seasons – spring/summer collections have moved to sale, but fall/winter collections have not arrived yet and holiday is still a ways off.

"Retail generally trails off a bit in the summer months, which means Harrods has time to launch the site, see what works and fix what does not work without sacrificing much of their business," he said.

"Changing a Web site is a tricky project because a brand has to change things enough to let consumers notice a bit of freshness, but should not change so many things that its normal customers feel lost."

Final Take

Tricia Carr, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

© Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.