

COMMERCE

## Ralph Lauren plans Japanese ecommerce expansion with email sign-ups

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By TRICIA CARR

U.S. preppy retailer Ralph Lauren will open ecommerce to Japanese consumers this fall via its first digital flagship store in the Asian market and is building its email list in anticipation.

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The Japanese ecommerce site will stock select items including the fall/winter 2012 collection. Ralph Lauren is encouraging email sign-ups on the new site by telling consumers that they will be the first to shop online-exclusive items.

"The strategy behind Ralph Lauren's move to online retail is not a new concept within its history," said Mathew Evins, chairman of [Evins](#), New York. "In fact, it has been a part of its long-term goal to sell the Ralph Lauren lifestyle, not just product, through an engaging digital platform to modern and affluent consumers in the United States and eventually in key luxury markets worldwide.

"For the past few decades, Ralph Lauren has been a pioneer in digital marketing within the luxury retail market," he said. "The Ralph Lauren ecommerce site launched 11 years ago to much criticism, but ended up paving the way for many other luxury brands now online.

"Albeit the long-term struggle of the Japanese market since the bubble burst in the '80s, Japan still remains one of the largest markets in luxury retail, ranking second in the global luxury marketplace with a heavy emphasis on the apparel, accessories and leather goods industries as contrasted with the automotive, travel or electronics categories, according to the Luxury Marketing Council."

Mr. Evins is not affiliated with Ralph Lauren, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Ralph Lauren declined comment.

Setting up shop

Ralph Lauren's Japanese ecommerce site will be hosted at <http://www.ralphlauren.co.jp>.

The label is currently adding to its list by asking Japanese-speaking consumers for their email addresses to keep them up-to-date on the opening of the site.



*Japanese ecommerce site*

The label is offering an incentive to sign up. Consumers who opt to receive emails will be the first to shop on the site and have the opportunity to buy limited-edition items unique to the Japanese ecommerce site.

Ralph Lauren is asking consumers to specify their genders upon email signup, which will help the label target consumers as they roll out ecommerce abilities.

Also, sharing the site with friends is encouraged after consumers submit their information to the site via a form.

The label seems to be creating momentum for the new site among target consumers by asking for email addresses, which will be valuable once the site is fully functioning to trigger sales.



*U.S. ecommerce site*

Consumers are also being encouraged to sign-up for updates via [Ralph Lauren's Facebook page](#). The label probably has a lot of international fans in the Asian market if it chose to spread the word via Facebook.

Meanwhile, when consumers arrive at Ralph Lauren's ecommerce site, an opening page shows the markets where ecommerce is enabled including the U.S., Austria, Belgium, France and Germany. Japan is listed as coming soon, but users can click to go to the email signup page.



*Ralph Lauren's Web site*

"Japanese consumers are very much into exclusive and limited-time" editions," Mr. Evins said. "If the label includes a few online-only, limited-edition pieces that are also sold in the U.S. and that are iconic Ralph Lauren, they will sell.

"Needless to say, the brand should also create a mobile-friendly application since that is where most Japanese people spend personal time online," he said. "Also, Ralph Lauren should be savvy with the mobile app, as Japanese people like to read and look at things in a different direction, sometimes thanks to the traditional book form.

"Lastly, the label should add music since Japanese people love U.S. music and it will probably help it sell better."

World at your fingertips

Asian markets are proving to be of utmost importance to luxury brands by their actions to expand, including Asian-specific campaigns and new ecommerce capabilities.

Ecommerce could be a way for brands to test the waters in Asian markets before opening physical stores.

Some brands are choosing to work with third-party companies to ensure a smooth transition into the Asian market.

For example, Italian label Missoni is using Shangpin.com as its exclusive Chinese retailer.

The high-end ecommerce site now has exclusive rights to the M Missoni brand to offer products from the designer's youth-oriented collection to the Asian luxury market ([see story](#)).

In addition, Neiman Marcus Group is looking to establish itself as a major international luxury brand by expanding to the Asian market with a new online shopping and editorial site later this year.

The retailer took a \$28 million stake in Glamour Sales Holding, a private ecommerce company that specializes in authorized online flash sales for consumers in China and Japan. The company will host Neiman Marcus' first ecommerce site in China ([see story](#)).

Ralph Lauren has not said if it will use a third-party for its ecommerce site.

Since the label has a physical presence in Japan, its ecommerce expansion might signal that it will open more bricks-and-mortar stores in the major Asian markets and ecommerce will be extended to China soon, per Mr. Evins.

"Japan is a great entry ground for confident luxury brands and still ranks as the No. 2 market in the luxury industry, according to the Luxury Marketing Council," Mr. Evins said. "Japan also has enough physical Ralph Lauren retail stores, so people are familiar with fit, sizing and quality and the brand has a solid image there, both of which are integral elements to introducing product and lifestyle on ecommerce."

Meanwhile, Ralph Lauren should stick to its image, since Japanese consumers are interested in buying into the U.S. lifestyle.

"Ralph Lauren should maintain what it does best – selling a lifestyle that is classic Ralph Lauren and not too Japanese-ified – and let consumers enjoy a dose of U.S. life through the Web site," Mr. Evins said. "For example, there is no need to translate each word into Japanese characters."

"The interesting thing is that some Japanese brand sites will actually use some English words to draw attention to it and make it easier to navigate," he said. "Ralph Lauren, being a traditional U.S. brand, should maintain some of its key Ralph Lauren words and easy item names in English."

Final Take

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