

IN-STORE

Audi creates 360-degree digital display in new showrooms

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By TRICIA CARR

German automaker Audi opened its first digital showroom in London to personalize customer service and attract tech-savvy consumers to a more central, compact space than a traditional shop.

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Luxury Daily

The in-store digital experience called Audi City will roll out to more than 20 international cities by 2015. The current spotlight on London for the 2012 Olympics and the Diamond Jubilee celebration backs the automaker's decision to open the store near its Piccadilly Circus shopping area.

"Audi has positioned itself as a brand steeped in technology, service and design," said Garen Moreno, Los Angeles-based partner at [CuldeSac](#). "This digital showroom is directly in line with its brand values and pushes the Audi message further.

"It is something you would expect from Audi, so for its fans and future customers it adds tremendous value to be on the forefront and London is a perfect location," he said. "Audi, with its wide range of vehicles, attracts a variety of consumers.

"For its higher range of vehicles, its more discerning customer will notice the emphasis on service that is expected and for its entry-level consumers, this brand experience can

open the door to the Audi universe showing that Audi is an attainable brand.”

Mr. Moreno is not affiliated with Audi, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Audi was not available for comment before press deadline.

Four-circle service

Audi City is showing the automaker’s full model line-up in the condensed digital showroom. This allows the brand to be present at the center of major cities, rather than needing a larger space to show all of its vehicles.

The new showroom format launched July 16 in London to combine the digital product presentation and physical contact with the brand while improving the relationship with consumers, per Audi.

Offerings at Audi City include one-on-one interactions with Audi customer service and new bespoke options.

Consumers can select vehicle options from a digital media system that include colors, equipment options and functions. There are more than 100 million possible configurations.

Then, consumers can view their bespoke vehicle on a 1:1 scale on large screens.

There are also technologies in the space that let consumers see drivetrain, body shell and LED light technology more closely.



Audi City

Audi will employ a customer relationship manager at each Audi City location who will be responsible for seeing a purchase through from beginning to end and any future service needed. All employees will be taken through a new training program designed for these city-center locations.

Also, each Audi City will be connected to an outlying Audi dealership so that service needs can be directed to that location.

Audi City will be incorporated into the marketing efforts of new mobility services and electric-drive models, per the brand.

Locations will also serve as a meeting place for Audi fans and a public forum. After the business day ends, Audi City may host readings, round-table discussions and exhibitions dedicated to urban development, art, culture and design.

“This adds value to Audi by extending the portability of the brand, taking the brand to the consumer in markets and areas that would not be possible without the use of technology,” said Ryan Hattaway, president of **Mogul Media Group**, Miami.

“It will increase Audi's brand visibility in key global markets and allow Audi to further develop relationships with customers and educate them on its vehicles,” he said. “It also adds value to the surrounding community since Audi plans to use the showrooms after hours to host art, cultural and design functions and round-table discussions.”



Audi R8

Dare to go digital

Luxury automakers that put on physical events likely do so to let consumers see the innovations and designs of their models in-person. This experience can top the digital experience because consumers get a 360-degree view.

However, digital campaigns that show these qualities of vehicles are also imperative since not all affluent consumers have access to a showroom at all times. Digital, social and mobile campaigns can reach them during all hours.

Audi is combining both of these channels to create an in-store experience that shows consumers who favor digital innovations that the brand is on the upward track.

Luxury consumers participate in events to get an experience that parallels how the brand's products make them feel, so Audi will probably be top-of-mind to tech-savvy consumers as it rolls out its Audi City locations.

“The Audi City concept is part of a larger trend we are seeing with technology today called 'live environments,’” Mr. Hattaway said. “By incorporating the digital showroom concept in strategic markets, Audi can design a completely immersive experience throughout the

store, allowing it to control the degree to which the consumers' senses are engaged.

“By creating a virtual environment where the consumer is participating in the experience and has the ability to interact with the content in intuitive ways, Audi can increase the desirability and meaningfulness of the brand experience,” he said.

However, digital showrooms cannot act as replacements to traditional ones, but should complement the digital experience.

“Nothing can replace getting behind the wheel of a car and experiencing that first test drive and that new car smell, but the digital showrooms offer brands an opportunity to extend their reach into areas that would not otherwise be accessible for regular showrooms,” Mr. Hattaway said.

“They create an interactive, experiential learning environment to educate consumers on the product and become an initial touch point for the brand to engage the consumer, establish a relationship and get them excited enough about the product so they will take the next step, visit a regular showroom and get behind the wheel,” he said.

Luxury consumers of all demographics are becoming more tech-savvy, and this digital showroom will help the brand to reach them in metropolitan areas.

“Luxury automobiles are often made-to-order, personalizing color, trim and body style,” CuldeSac's Mr. Moreno said. “Luxury consumers are accustomed to wait for their individual purchase because it is unique.

“This ideal location in an easily accessible urban space can be an ideal setting to develop relationships with the luxury audience,” he said.

“Service, attention to detail and quality relationships are foundations in any luxury retail environment and this digital showroom adds a layer of rich technology that will be attractive to its entire customer base.”

Final Take

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