

IN-STORE

How-to guide for luxury brand store windows

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By TRICIA CARR

Storied window displays that combine art with apparel and accessories while steering clear of technology will attract locals and tourists to flagship locations and meet the evolving tastes of affluent consumers.

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Luxury Daily

Luxury brands should examine their target audience before crafting a window display and often a combination of art and fashion will help reach nearby affluent consumers as well as tourists. Experts agree that technology is not imperative for a successful window display since this is a rare opportunity for brands to showcase the physical attributes of their products.

“For many years, window displays were the first point-of-contact that consumers had with brands,” said Christina French Houghton, associate strategist at [Siegel+Gale](#), New York. “Even though this has changed in recent years since today, a brand’s Web site is often the first consumer touch point, window displays continue to play an important role in shaping customer perceptions.

“As the first point of contact before a consumer enters into a retail space, window displays continue to give consumers essential information,” she said. “They can communicate what is contained within the retail space, offer information about certain

products and sales and, perhaps most importantly, set expectations about the experience that the consumer will have within the store's walls."

Window to the soul

Store windows must tell a captivating brand story in 10 seconds or less, per Molly Leis, principal of [MRL Communications](#), New York.

"The luxury consumer is educated and knowledgeable and they should expect a luxury brand to communicate craft, quality, heritage and honesty while speaking to the milieu and staying relevant," Ms. Leis said. "An audience will literally buy into a narrative they can believe in."

These qualities of window displays do not only apply to holiday windows, as summer, spring and fall are important times to tell a brand story. The weather and distinct travel seasons will leave locals and tourists out-and-about and willing to participate in a luxury brand message.

Luxury retailers should get to know their consumers in order to craft windows that will draw the attention of the correct audience, or the one that will purchase products.

"Unconventional windows such as art displays can be used as effective, attention-grabbing marketing strategies," Siegel+Gale's Ms. Houghton said. "Achieving success or failure depends on how well brands and retailers understand the tastes and habits of their target audiences.

"Bergdorf Goodman has been so successful at creating beautiful, memorable window displays that Assouline recently published a book chronicling the 'best of a decade's worth of displays, legendary for their artistry, detail and sly visual jokes,'" she said.

Also, windows are a way for luxury brands to attract tourists who might not be familiar with the area, but are more likely to be wandering around and looking to spend money.

"It is key to understand the demographics of the consumers who shop in your store whether it is a resident or tourist," said Kathleen Fischer, marketing manager at [Boston Retail Partners](#), Boston. "Once you understand the demographics you can tailor the store window to your customer.

"Store windows are all about grabbing people's attention and the luxury audience can be a difficult audience to grab," she said. "Art is one area that grabs the luxury market's attention because oftentimes they are the few who can afford it.

"Attractive, innovative, eye-catching windows can immediately draw a customer into the store and no other marketing channel pays off so easily and quickly."

Art as the subject of a window display can create a museum-like atmosphere for a luxury brands.

Since individuality and design are qualities that most brands want to highlight, store windows' art can parallel the products inside the store.

For example, Barneys New York collaborated with the Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art to display a public art exhibit in the retailer's windows at its flagship location on Madison Avenue in New York.

The windows displayed the first United States showing of the traveling "destefashioncollection" public art show. This art initiative is meant to mix the notions of art, fashion and the culture and could leverage the brand among art-minded affluent consumers ([see story](#)).



"The Capsule" by Athina Rachel Tsangari

In addition, to celebrate Chanel's Little Black Jacket exhibition coming to New York, the French fashion label is using its boutique locations to drive sales and increase event awareness.

Window displays in Chanel boutiques will correspond with the exhibit by presenting a selection of jackets from the Paris-Bombay Métiers d'art collection ([see story](#)).

These types of displays nod to the fact that window shopping is a cultural pastime, per Garen Moreno, Los Angeles-based partner at [CuldeSac](#).

"In instances like Deste taking over Barneys' window display, it turns conventional window merchandising literally on its head," Mr. Moreno said. "Even walking through the streets of Ginza in Japan or in and around Via Monte Napoleone in Milan, traditional yet creative window merchandising is key.

"Throughout the day you see families and groups of friends walking through the streets 'oohing' and 'awing' at the merchandise and their prices, but these two areas are focal points for haute fashion and the displays are as valuable as the catwalk," he said.

Art displays are an intriguing break from the norm, but are not ideal if a brand is looking to push products.

"Of course, there is a fine line between creating an engaging customer experience and building an effective sales platform," Siegel+Gale's Ms. Houghton said. "If a luxury retailer gives the display over to art instead of merchandise too regularly, consumers

might lose sight of their connection to the merchandise contained within the store's footprint."

What not to pair

If a brand partnership is happening within the store, a set of windows devoted to this effort is an ideal way to draw eyes and eventually foot traffic to a flagship location.

"Window displays should resonate with a brand's customers, affluent or otherwise," Ms. Houghton said. "One way of doing this is by connecting the window display to messages that are top-of-mind for consumers.

"For example, if a high-end retailer has secured an exclusive partnership with a much-coveted designer, they can use window displays to creatively communicate the initiative to customers," she said. "The display can become an extension of larger brand partnerships, and a forum for the retailer's brand voice to publically emerge."

Louis Vuitton is currently using this tactic to draw tourists, especially those from Japan, to its flagship Fifth Avenue store in New York. The brand is showcasing its collection collaboration with Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama.



Louis Vuitton Kusama windows

Meanwhile, some brands are using technology in store windows to get attention from luxury consumers.

For example, Italian fashion house Gucci is working with Samsung Electronics to make a store window display, which will push a store section devoted to the label's timepieces and jewelry that combines physical and mobile commerce.

Samsung Transparent LCD screens will be placed in some of its flagship storefront windows to allow the label to show digital images in its windows as well as products behind the images that consumers will be able to see from the outside of the store ([see story](#)).

In addition, Michael Kors used mobile call-outs on windows in select stores to raise awareness for its Mother's Day campaign called What She Wants in the two weeks leading up to the holiday that could be most crucial for appealing to last-minute shoppers.

What She Wants lets consumers win items selected by Michael Kors via a Facebook app ([see story](#)).

Brands should weigh the pros and cons of digital and mobile technology-focused window displays since this is a rare opportunity for luxury brands to take a break from technology and social media.

"The only must-have for window displays is relevance, meaning displays should communicate a timely message to their customers and in a voice that resonates with that brand," Ms. Houghton said.

"Similarly, I do not believe that brands and retailers must implement technology into their window displays," she said. "In fact, window displays can be a nice departure from our otherwise technologically-enhanced world and an opportunity for brands to create simple, elegant presentations that bring the artistic, natural beauty of the luxury brands they promote front-of-mind."

Indeed, technology is not the best way to draw the affluent audience via store windows. Rather, a localized display that is not spread via digital channels will help keep up the exclusivity factor for luxury brands.

"Incorporating technology is not imperative," MRL Communications' Ms. Leis said. "It is another level of interaction but should be used judiciously and only when the medium is appropriate for the brand and the message it wants to convey."

"Successful brands do localize their visual display just as they would with their merchandise mix," she said. "It is important to speak to the concerns, needs and dreams of that particular market."

Window displays are just as important as runway shows to luxury brands and can act as a viral message, per CuldeSac's Mr. Moreno.

In fact, windows are a channel that luxury marketers should embrace during rebranding efforts.

"Using the vertical square meters of a store front as a positioning tool to rise above traditional merchandising is something that very few brands can do," Mr. Moreno said. "Many times throughout the lifespan of a brand there are moments where it will need to reposition itself, maybe to set itself apart from competing brands or perhaps the brand message has been diluted over strategic mishaps."

“Whatever the case, unless the brand identity is very clear and its customers trust wholeheartedly in the brand and its offerings, using a window display to show merchandise is a way not only to capture attention but to establish trust in what the store has to offer,” he said.

“Imaginative and elaborate window displays that take the viewer on a journey into a romantic brand world are tools to enamor possible customers with your brand and bring them into the store.”

Final Take

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