

ADVERTISING

## Who are the big personalities in luxury?

July 30, 2012



By TRICIA CARR

Brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Michael Kors and Marc Jacobs that have strong personalities behind their brand will be more likely to create an impression among consumers and achieve lifelong affinity from the public, something marketers should strive to do.

[Sign up now](#)

**Luxury Daily**

Some of the major luxury players today include Karl Lagerfeld, Marc Jacobs, Michael Kors, Alexander Wang, Sarah Burton and Frida Giannini, experts say. These personalities are beloved by affluent consumers because they show a human side to the brand and give it a strong public push that cannot be achieved any other way.

"The relationship between a fashion brand and its lead designer is a complex one," said Molly Leis, principal of [MRL Communications](#), New York. "In a moment where a high-profile designer can make or break a brand, fashion often looks to their designer to visualize not only the collection, but the brand's strategy as well.

"There is an emphasis for the designer to stay on-brand and to leverage the heritage of the brand, but in some cases the designer trumps the brand," she said. "This depends on the company's own brand positioning, marketing and public relations plan and the personality of the lead designer.

"Do they love the limelight or shun attention, or do they interact well with consumers in-

store or not?"

Face to a name

Private label Chanel probably has the most prominent personality behind the brand: Karl Lagerfeld.

Coming close behind are companies that have been built on the vision of their founders. These include Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, Michael Kors and Marc Jacobs, per Ms. Leis.

Marc Jacobs has created a big personality for himself in the fashion industry for his designs and involvement with his brand.

Also, upscale brands such as Marc Jacobs and Michael Kors have their names at their helm, so the public knows exactly to whom to give attention.

Embedded Video: <http://www.youtube.com/embed/rsSOrgMCBdM>

*Michael Kors' personal introduction to the Living the Kors Life campaign*

Meanwhile, new designers such as Alexander Wang and Thakoon Panichgul are inspiration for a younger generation of fashion gurus.

Personalities can also assist in revitalizing luxury brands, per Alexandre Meerson, managing partner at [La Boutique de Luxe](#), Paris.

Alber Elbaz at Lanvin and Riccardo Tisci at Givenchy gave these labels a makeover in the public eye.

"Look at how Lanvin has been revitalized by Mr. Elbaz," Mr. Meerson said. "One can really say that his vision and direction has given a new life to this iconic brand.

"Furthermore, look at how Givenchy with Mr. Tisci and Kenzo saw their flames reignited," he said. "There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that creative directors and designers are the essence of luxury brands."

There are also behind-the-scenes personalities that are admired.

Alexander McQueen creative director Sarah Burton is known for her quiet creativity and good nature.

"It is most important that consumers can relate to them," said Milton Pedraza, CEO of the [Luxury Institute](#), New York. "These are affluent people who can relate to these personalities and it creates a much greater halo effect for the brand."

More personality

Brands Louis Vuitton and Gucci have managed to keep the identities of their creative directors despite being under conglomerates Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton and PPR, respectively.

In addition to his own brand, Marc Jacobs, creative director of Louis Vuitton, helps to point the French label in the right direction in the luxury sector through his personality.

Embedded Video: [http://www.youtube.com/embed/U6Kn35xF\\_nc](http://www.youtube.com/embed/U6Kn35xF_nc)

*Marc Jacobs introduces the Louis Vuitton Yayoi Kusama collection*

Ms. Giannini, creative director of Gucci, is a quieter personality of the brand, but still embodies the label's values.

Interestingly, Ralph Lauren and Miucca Prada are still the personalities behind their brands, but also the movers behind the name-labels of luxury conglomerates.

Also, Thomas Mayer of PPR's Bottega Veneta is known for his creativity, while staying humble and kind to the public eye.

"The absolute genius of the likes of LVMH, Richmont and, to a certain extent, of PPR is to really understand the essence of luxury – that it is based on creation, scarcity, service and craftsmanship. and therefore its rhythm," La Boutique de Luxe's Mr. Meerson said.

"LVMH has managed to preserve the identity and even to recreate and reignite the spirit of some 'maisons de luxe' that had lost their luster and flame," he said. "They even took what would have been considered incredible risks by appointing creative directors with very strong personalities that could 'rock the boats' and were successful in the end.

In addition, there are different mindsets in the luxury sector at the moment regarding the personalities behind conglomerates versus private labels, per Michael Silvia, partner at [Evins Ltd.](#), New York.

Conglomerates run the risk of letting an individual form their career at a major brand, and then taking a piece of that essence away when he or she leaves the pursue a private label.

"The first, which is very much a pro-conglomeration mindset, sees the involvement of a marquee personality as a detriment to the overall brand," he said. "When one personality drives the ship, it is less about the brand's name and more about the personality.

"Think Tom Ford," he said. "At some point, he eclipsed the brand he designed for, Gucci, and so it really became about Ford.

"There is nowhere for someone like that to go but outside the organization, taking much of the brand's cache with them."

The second frame of mind is that personalities are vital to private labels.

"For them, there is a real interest in setting their own path and building their name and their brand as one single entity," he said. "It is not an easy road, but it is one that is increasingly more viable with the birth of social media, bloggers and alternative channels for recognition beyond the traditional vanguards of style."

Who are you?

Brands that are looking to create an identity in today's luxury marketplace may want to rely on brand ambassadors such as creative directors, designers and CEOs to lead the way.

However, not just anyone should be put in the spotlight.

Brand personalities should be there to increase credibility by showing that the brand has a purpose beyond just selling products.

“The creative director helps to give a personality to a brand and shows the talent and genius behind a brand, whether that was the creator or a suitor to the brand,” Luxury Institute's Mr. Pedraza said. “These people should be respected, known, human beings behind a brand.

“People want to know that these people have great talent and good values, and are customer-centric, admired, respected and socially-responsible,” he said.

“Because a lot of storytelling comes from these people, or stories can be told about these people, it makes a company stand out from competitors that are just known for products.”

Outside of apparel and accessories, brand personalities are less prevalent.

There are experts such as Wendy Perrin at Condé Nast Traveler who are personable, give good advice and are advocates for the consumer, but these are not the same as the creative personality behind a brand.

Indeed, it is not appropriate for every type of brand to have a public persona.

“If they are the creative palate behind the brand, then it makes sense,” Luxury Institute's Mr. Pedraza said.

“Look at Steve Jobs at Apple,” he said. “He made up the creativity behind the brand, but not so much with Bill Gates. He was the leader of Microsoft, but not the creative mind.”

Many industries, as they have become dominated by corporate entities, have migrated away from the star personality, per Evins' Mr. Silvia.

“The auto industry is no longer the province of Shelbys and Agnellis,” Mr. Silvia said.

“Media companies are run by the board of directors rather than one namesake figurehead.

“In fact, advertising agencies are a perfect example – where are the Ogilvys and the Bernbachs?” he said. “Don Draper would be marginalized in today’s world for a fiefdom of talent to prevent any one person leaving with the agency business.”

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.