

MOBILE

Neiman Marcus, Visa engage users via personalized, location-based SMS

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By TRICIA CARR

High-end retail chain Neiman Marcus is testing a mobile initiative in partnership with Visa that allows consumers to get personalized, real-time offers via SMS depending on location and purchase history.

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Luxury Daily

Consumers can enroll in the nmbuzz mobile program with their eligible Visa account and mobile number at <http://neimanmarcus.com/nmbuzz>. The personalized messages that Neiman Marcus will send its customers based on all purchases, not just those in its own retail stores, will likely give its retention a boost.

“This is part of our overall strategy to allow our customers the ability to communicate with us using any means they like, at any time they like, from any place they like,” said Ginger Reeder, vice president of corporate communications for **Neiman Marcus Group**, Dallas, TX.

“It is just one more way we can strengthen our relationship with our customers,” she said.

All a-buzz

The nmbuzz SMS messages will give consumers special offers, fashion news from Neiman Marcus experts and updates on sneak previews and designer appearances.

The program is aimed at fashion-minded consumers, per the retailer.

Nmbuzz uses Visa's messaging technology that "allows merchants to send real-time discounts and promotions that are tailored to a consumer's lifestyle," per the financial company.

The nmbuzz Web site gives consumers directions to enroll with their Visa card and text-enabled mobile number. In addition, users who do not have a Visa card are encouraged to sign up for the Neiman Marcus email newsletter.



Nmbuzz site

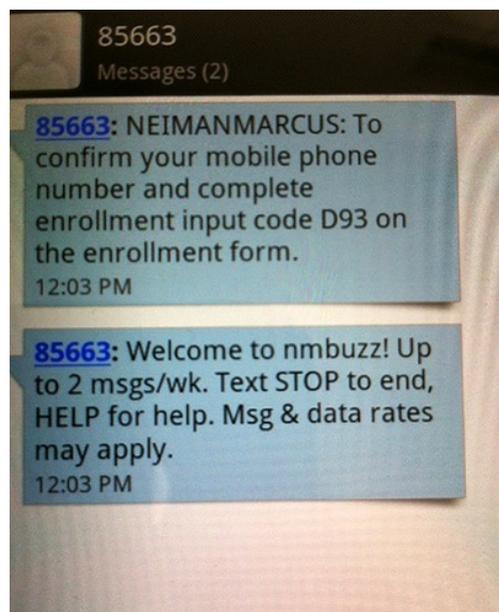
The enrollment button links to a Visa site where users must enter their name, email address, mobile number and Visa card information. Three Visa cards can be linked to a single mobile number.

A screenshot of the nmbuzz Enrollment form. The title "nmbuzz Enrollment" is in a pink header. Below it is a section "How it works" with a brief description. The main section is "Your Information" with a note: "Getting started is easy! Please note that you will need your mobile phone and Visa card(s) as you complete the online enrollment form below." The form contains several input fields: "First Name:" and "Last Name:" (text boxes with checkmarks); "Enter Your Email Address:" and "Confirm Your Email Address:" (text boxes with checkmarks); "Enter Your Mobile Phone:" and "Confirm Your Mobile Phone:" (text boxes with checkmarks); "Enter Your Visa Card Number:" (text box with checkmark); "Card Expiration Date:" (MM and YYYY dropdown menus with checkmarks); and "Billing Zip Code:" (text box with checkmark).

Enrollment form

Once enrolled, consumers will receive up to two messages per week that are

personalized based on card use and location.



Confirmation text

For instance, if a consumer uses a Visa card to make a purchase near a Neiman Marcus location, an SMS message could be sent that tells about an upcoming event at the stores that includes a gift with purchase. This could certainly keep the retailer top of mind to its consumers while they are in the mood to shop.

The SMS program aligns with Visa's privacy policy. Users must opt in to the program and they can opt out anytime.

Fashionable texting

A few other luxury marketers are using SMS this quarter to reach their target consumers, but SMS seems to be underused in the luxury sector.

One recent example is department store chain Bloomingdale's SMS contest with Microsoft that is taking place each day of the semi-annual "Hot" event Sept. 6-16, which could boost its appeal to a younger audience.

Consumers can text "ITSON" to 51515 for the chance to win a Microsoft prize pack. It includes a Windows tablet, Microsoft Wedge Touch Mouse and Keyboard, and Windows 7 and Microsoft Office 2010 featuring OneNote ([see story](#)).

In addition, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars is upping its service to affluent consumers who are searching for pre-owned vehicles via a new digital tool that is mobile-compatible and gives availability updates via SMS and email ([see story](#)).

Neiman Marcus is aiming to reach its consumers in a way that they prefer, per the retailer.

It is surprising that there are not more SMS programs out there from luxury marketers since it is safe to say that all affluent consumers use this communication channel.

In addition, SMS is an opt-in channel similar to email. It could be a way to retain brand loyalists with exclusive information and promotions that consumers want to receive.

The nmbuzz program could be strengthened in the future by giving consumers a few additional ways to interact via mobile such as a mobile Web site, MMS or QR codes, per Jeff Hasen, chief marketing officer of [Hipcricket](#), Kirkland, WA.

In addition, Neiman Marcus may be limiting consumer participation too much by only allowing Visa users to access the program.

"Of course, interacting with consumers via mobile is wise for Neiman Marcus," Mr. Hasen said. "A barrier for some will be the need to enter the VIP club with a credit card number since many limit the sharing of that information.

"The savviest marketers give consumers the ability to participate on their individual terms," he said. "That is the ultimate in personalization."

Final Take

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