

IN-STORE

Mercedes targets young affluents via digital showroom experience

September 17, 2012



By TRICIA CARR

German automaker Mercedes-Benz is introducing consumers in Milan to the new A-Class model through its first digital concept showroom, prompting both affluent and aspirational consumers to want in on the action.

[Sign up now](#)

Luxury Daily

The “Visionary Store” will present the A-Class digitally and physically so that consumers can interact with the model as well as connect with friends on social media-enabled devices in-store. Mercedes will likely attract attention from all demographics due to the increased attention that the automaker is giving to the customer experience.

“The interactive Visionary Store is the latest highlight from Mercedes-Benz’s vision of a new way to address customers,” said Tobias Müller, head of lifestyle, brand and social media communications at Mercedes-Benz, Stuttgart, Germany. “It fits perfectly with the new A-Class as an ambassador for intelligent and connected mobility.

“After Germany, Italy is the second largest market for the A-Class and the new generation of compact cars,” he said. “We are convinced that the new A-Class will be a big success there.

“We also believe that a fascinating showroom concept like the Visionary Store is an

excellent fit for an equally fascinating fashion and lifestyle city like Milan.”

Virtual reality

Mercedes is taking a new service approach in its “Visionary Store” to get closer to its customers, per the automaker.

“The strategy for this new Visionary Store showroom seems to be to attract and provide an entertaining experience to a younger, technology-oriented group of consumers who can communicate their experience easily to members of their social network,” said Ron Kurtz, president of [American Affluence Research Center](#), Atlanta.

“This target group, many of which are probably aspirational consumers for luxury automakers, seems to be a good fit with the features and appeals of the A-Class model,” he said.

“Mercedes should be careful that the introduction of so much interactive technology does not cause it to lose sight of the importance of the personal interaction between the consumer and a knowledgeable and personable sales representative.”

The store will provide interactive digital opportunities for visitors such as a car configurator available on in-store iPads that lets users share their bespoke model via Facebook.



Visionary Store

Other interactive elements that will be used at the digital showroom include augmented reality, gesture-controlled Kinect technology and the automaker’s suite of apps.

Mercedes is also marketing the A-Class model through a multichannel campaign that includes a tour with a stop in Milan ([see story](#)).

"By engaging users with interactive and augmented technology, Mercedes is able to convey features and experiences that clients would not be able to experience just by looking at the A-Class," said Dalia Strum, president of Dalia Inc., New York.

"Virtual reality could even portray a more desired experience through the consumers' eyes

as opposed to what marketers convey through standard advertising and direct-marketing," she said.

Mercedes vs. Audi

German automaker Audi created its first Audi City showroom with seemingly similar goals to Mercedes' Visionary Store.

The automaker 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.

The in-store digital experience called Audi City will roll out to more than 20 international cities by 2015.

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 ([see story](#)).

It could be that luxury automakers, Mercedes and Audi included, want to continue to reach consumers via digital and mobile channels, but have them do so in a completely branded environment.

Consumers are likely comfortable using this type of technology, so it is a draw for young, affluent consumers who would like to learn more about the brands.

"All of the high-end automakers are seeking to work their way into Gen X and Gen Y," said Paula Rosenblum, managing partner at [RSR](#), Miami. "No one wants to be the next Cadillac.

"The object of the game is to communicate 'Not your father's...,'" she said. "They have to present a new image.

"The only possible exception is BMW, but Mercedes? Definitely."

However, automakers that incorporate digital aspects into showrooms should also be sure to include calls-to-action that lead consumers to dealerships.

"Mercedes is under intense competition on the global market from three other brands – Lexus, BMW and Audi," said Al Ries, chairman of focusing consultancy [Ries & Ries](#), Roswell, GA. "It is very difficult today to differentiate an automobile brand by design or technology.

"Everybody copies everybody very quickly," he said. "Therefore, Mercedes has obviously decided that it is going to differentiate its brand by services rather than product.

"Mercedes' showrooms in the United States are very service-oriented, and the Milan showroom takes this service orientation one step further, which could be very helpful to the brand."

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.