

INTERNET

Mercedes sees Web as channel to create lifelong relationships

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By TRICIA CARR

NEW YORK - A Mercedes-Benz USA executive at the Luxury Interactive 2012 conference said that optimizing a Web site for spontaneous navigation is the key to bolstering the platform for brand exploration and eventually purchasing.

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During the “Site Experience: Improving Results Through Engaging Customer Experience” presentation, the executive said that customizing site content based on what Mercedes’ consumers are looking for online is what helped to propel the automaker’s Web site in the rankings. Affluent consumers want to build their own brand experience and, therefore, a marketer’s Web site should offer paths to content, product information and payments.

“At the Mercedes site, you do not have to stay on the product pages,” said Derek Johnson, supervisor of digital marketing platforms at [Mercedes-Benz USA](#), Montvale, NJ. “You can go back and learn about the brand and performance, view the gallery and model pages, and build your own vehicle.

“The idea is to give people options, since you really do not know what your user is there for,” he said.

All in the stats

Mercedes' Web site is currently the No. 2 automotive site in the market.

The average time spent on the site is up to three times higher than the average site visitor likely because users are consuming brand content, per Mr. Johnson.

Visitors to Mercedes' site are more likely to build a vehicle, visit a model page, view a gallery, submit a lead and generate content, he said.

Mercedes likely achieves high ranks due to its efficient browsing methods that lead visitors to the right place. For instance, the brand leads consumers to a vehicle finder after they are done using the car configurator, which is the next natural step in the purchasing process.

The automaker sees its Web site as a channel to create lifelong relationships.

"We worked hard at understanding what the user wants when he or she comes to our Web site and offering that content," Mr. Johnson said. "Our content is highly rated, navigation is easy, speed is high and we have cut down as many barriers as possible.

"People come to Mercedes with a perception of what the brand is, and we have to meet that every time," he said.

Secrets to success

Mr. Johnson offered tips that luxury marketers can consider when looking to improve their Web sites or ecommerce sites.

Social media and mobile are often a large focus for luxury marketers, but Web sites should not be excluded from the mix. Rather, brand Web sites should act as a hub for brand content across all digital channels.

Internet users average 32 hours online per month, per Mr. Johnson. The average users spends approximately 20 percent of their time reading content and 5 percent online shopping.

Therefore, Mercedes has dedicated much of its site to brand content.

Also, the site does not limit users to one feature on each page.

One key factor in Mercedes' Web execution is spontaneous navigation.

"Web sites are more like choose-your-own-adventure than Nancy Drew," Mr. Johnson said. "People want to figure out where they will go next and do not want you to dictate where they want to go."

Mercedes does not limit its site to product pages since it is not certain why users have arrived at the site. The car brand offers lifestyle content such as its Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week content.

Marketers should marry social and Web site content. Social content should not stay on the social channels, but be spread through a brand's Web site.

This social content helps visitors to the automaker's Web site understand the facets of being a Mercedes owner, per Mr. Johnson

Above all, Mercedes is looking to bolster its Web site as a channel to build relationships with its customers beyond the purchase process.

"What are you doing to allow [consumers] to have spontaneous experiences on your Web site?" Mr. Johnson said. "I want to build a relationship with a Mercedes prospect, and I do not just want them to purchase a vehicle.

"There is potential to build the relationship beyond that," she said.

Final Take

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