

INTERNET

Luxury retailers transform Twitter to post-storm customer care hub

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By TRICIA CARR

Retailers such as Bergdorf Goodman, Barneys New York, Bloomingdale's and Saks Fifth Avenue are using their Twitter handles to share customer service news, store closure updates, ecommerce promotions and good wishes in response to Tropical Storm Sandy.



Twitter as a marketing channel is one of the most casual and immediate mediums through which brands can communicate with their customers. Therefore, it is appropriate for luxury marketers to transform their Twitter accounts at this time into a news feed that keeps their social community updated on setbacks caused by Sandy.

“Social media is all about being authentic and relatable, and online consumers expect the same from brands,” said Christine Kirk, CEO of **Social Muse Communications**, Los Angeles. “Luxury brands that acknowledge a major current event are showing their loyal customers and potential customers that they are tuned in to what is going on in their lives and what matters to them.

“This helps build continued loyalty for the brand,” she said. “Consumers will remember the brand being there for them.”

#HurricaneSandy

While Facebook is flooding with updates from friends and family, consumers seem to be gravitating towards Twitter to read about the aftermath of Sandy on a larger scale.

Luxury retailers are taking this chance to provide customer service and messages of safety.

It seems that although corporate teams are unable to get to their offices, public relations and marketing executives are keeping the brand conversation going on Twitter.

"New York is a huge hub for brands like Bergdorf, Barneys and Saks," said Brittany Mills, director of client services for **B Culture Media**, Atlanta. "Their customers are tweeting about #Sandy and being affected by it, and I think it is smart for those brands to acknowledge the storm and not just ignore it.

"Brands portray a persona, whether they realize it or not, and embracing current events should be a part of their best practices," she said.

"Even though it is not always directly related to products, they are still helping to build that relationship with their customers."

Bergdorf is certainly leveraging its status as a New York lifestyle brand during the storm. It began tweeting updates from its Twitter handle **@Bergdorfs** Sunday, Oct. 28 evening.

One tweet was a brand "public service announcement." It said "with Sandy in mind, we're closing at 5 p.m. today. Get ready & stay safe!"

Another tweet on Sunday helped to spread the news of New York public transportation closures.

Bergdorf also used Twitter images to show its boarded windows.

Furthermore, posts on Monday, Oct. 29 and Tuesday, Oct. 30 gave followers service information as well as news about the storm's affect on New York.

One tweet Monday read, "FYI - if you need customer service assistance tomorrow, please call 877 908 1180 & our online team can assist!"

A tweet from **@Bergdorfs** on Tuesday read, "Sending best wishes & thoughts to those affected by Sandy. If there's one thing we know, this City is resilient."



Bergdorf tweets

"It is extremely important for major retailers and companies to acknowledge and provide support, either emotional or informational, to the community," said Dalia Strum, president

of Dalia Inc., New York. “Their clientele were truly affected by this national disaster, and it's important to connect with them during their time in need.

“@Bergdorfs was the most successful at providing valuable communication and creating valuable engagements,” she said. “It is important for luxury retailers to shape social media strategies based on current events because it shows the sensitive side of the brand.

“They are not just focused on their bottom line, but are truly concerned about their community and recovering safe and sound.”

Safety first

Twitter seems to be the primary communication channel used by other luxury retailers to post store closure alerts.

Barneys tweeted Tuesday, Oct. 30 from [@BarneysNY](#), “We're happy to be re-opening our Madison Avenue store today, but our hearts are with all those affected by the storm. Lots of love to all!”



Barneys tweet

In addition, [@NeimanMarcus](#) posted, “Today Westchester, Short Hills & Paramus are closed. Tysons, DC & Prussia will open late. Boston & Natick are open. Be careful though!”

“I think Twitter is the most effective channel to communicate about #Sandy,” B Culture Media's Ms. Mills said. “Brands have the ability to quickly join a conversation and stay relevant.

“Twitter is also very mobile-friendly, and I am sure a lot of residents are living off of their mobile devices for the time being,” she said.

Saks said via its [@Saks](#) Twitter handle Tuesday, Oct. 30: “Our NY store is closed today but Boston, Richmond, Bala Cynwyd and Chevy Chase are open!”



Saks tweets

Also, [@Nordstrom](#) posted, “If you're in Hurricane Sandy’s path, please stay safe!” and included a link to view store closures.

Meanwhile, men’s online retailer Mr Porter is using social media to alert customers on mail delays.

On Twitter, the brand posted Monday, “It may also take us longer than usual to dispatch orders in the US. Stay safe everyone.”

On Tuesday, Oct. 30, [@MrPorterLive](#) posted a link to a service update for customers in the United States, Canada, Central American and South America.



Mr Porter tweet

Storm sale

To make up for lost foot traffic to New York retail locations, luxury retailers are also pushing ecommerce via Twitter at this time.

Bloomingdale’s posted Tuesday, “A lot of stores r still closed today in the NY area but u can always shop online! Free ship on all \$50+ online orders!” with a link to its ecommerce site.

The department store chain also posted from its [@Bloomingdales](#) Twitter handle, “Ends today! Save an extra 20% w/ code LOVESHOES when u buy 2+ pairs of regular-priced or already reduced shoes!” It was promoting this discount before the storm as well.



Bloomingdale's tweets

Additionally, Saks posted yesterday to those New Yorkers stuck inside, “On <http://saks.com> to pass the time? We have free shipping! Use the code on the top of your screen.”

Luxury retailers should be sure to keep their ecommerce messages tasteful during the aftermath of Sandy so they do not take away from the seriousness of the storm.

That said, it could also hurt the brand image if a retailer - especially one with locations in the storm's path - neglects the natural disaster altogether.

“There is a fine line between commiserating with the consumer and coming off as capitalizing on a natural disaster,” Social Muse’s Ms. Kirk said. “No brand wants to be so

forward and focused on pushing an ecommerce agenda that they are accused of trying to take advantage of consumers in a time of need.

“The worst thing for a brand to do on social media is when a major natural disaster news event takes place, like a hurricane or earthquake, and they tweet totally unrelated content, agenda-pushing tweets or automated tweets that were scheduled ahead of the event that are totally off-topic and as if the news event weren’t taking place,” she said.

“In this fast-paced world, news travels at lightning speed, and brands who have pre-scheduled tweets sending out content un-related to a major news event is disingenuous at best, and insensitive at its worst.”

Final Take

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