

MOBILE

Future of luxury brand augmented reality: Wow to utility

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By TRICIA CARR

Luxury marketers that have adapted to mobile marketing are using augmented reality to bring products to life, but going forward, the focus should shift to utility rather than relying on the wow-factor, experts say.

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Automakers, for example, are using augmented reality on mobile devices to let consumers take a 360-degree tour of models and jewelers are paving the way for augmented reality try-on experiences. Brands that want to implement these types of mobile campaigns should be sure to educate consumers on the technology and focus on problem-solving through the platform as well as providing a spectacle.

“Augmented reality has been gaining a lot of attention in the mobile marketing space,” said Shuli Lowy, marketing director at [Ping Mobile](#), Beverly Hills, CA. “It is hands down one of the glitziest genres of mobile marketing out there.

“Automakers, jewelry marketers and high-end fashion brands seem to be the primary users at this point,” she said. “However, augmented reality is extremely valuable to all luxury brands.”

Try it on

Augmented reality is used often in the automotive and jewelry sectors of the luxury industry.

“This provides a great way to experience a product or brand in a fun, engaging and meaningful way, without physically engaging with the product,” said John Casey, founder of [Freshfluff](#), New York.

“In addition, augmented reality can be a great way to highlight a product or brand in a visually-appealing manner,” he said. “In that sense, it is a perfect fit for luxury automakers and jewelers because providing a visual and experiential appreciation of a product and brand is an excellent way to build a relationship with digital customers.”

Jewelry marketers are using augmented reality to create a virtual-try on experience.

For example, precision-cut crystal maker Swarovski is pushing its new how-to book through companion iPhone and Android applications that let consumers virtually try on jewelry and see themselves as the book’s cover model ([see story](#)).

Last year, French fashion label Chanel pushed its J12 watch collection through an app for the iPad and iPhone. The app details the J12 collections including the Marine, Rétrograde Mystérieuse and Chromatic, and allows consumers to virtually try them on using an augmented reality feature ([see story](#)).



Chanel app

These apps focus on a particular campaign by providing a utility to users.

“What I see coming around in augmented reality is more and more utility,” said Aki Spicer, director of digital strategy at [Fallon](#), Minneapolis. “The core of the presentation is bringing things to life in ways that you would never have been able to do before.

“Now, as devices and picture integrity get better, augmented reality is bringing things to life with digital technology,” he said.

Test drive

Meanwhile, automakers are using augmented reality to show their vehicles in an everyday setting.

For instance, General Motors’ Cadillac pushed the new ATS model through augmented reality installations in top U.S. marketers by transforming street murals into driving experiences on smartphones and tablets ([see story](#)).

Cadillac augmented reality

In addition, British sports car manufacturer McLaren Automotive is flaunting its P1 concept aero car through an augmented reality mobile application for the iPhone and Android devices.

The app requires users to print a sketch of the model from the automaker's Facebook page so that they can view the P1 model in front of them ([see story](#)).

"Consumers buy luxury items because they perceive more value in them," Ping Mobile's Ms. Lowy said. "Whether it is the item's design, power, functionality or reputation, there is something in a luxury product that makes a consumer willing to pay a premium to have it."

Virtual reality

In general, marketers – luxury and mainstream included – are in the early stages of augmented reality adoption.

A U.S. study by Ping Mobile found that less than 9 percent of consumers have engaged with augmented reality and 73.3 percent have never heard of it.

"The advantage of running an augmented reality campaign this early on is that the opportunity to impress a consumer is infinitely multiplied," Ms. Lowy said. "Since most people have never even heard of it, any form of augmented reality instantly blows them away and leaves them in jaw-dropped awe.

"The down side is that augmented reality campaigns are fairly costly to run, especially when they are showcased in a physical location," she said. "Since consumers do not know how to interact with them, brands will usually purchase and place their own tablets next to the trigger and hire extra personnel to show people how to launch it."

The retail world is moving aggressively onto mobile platforms, per Freshfluff's Mr. Casey.

It is important for luxury marketers to explore their options that bring augmented reality and the retail experience together.

"I think it is a win anytime a luxury brand, or any retailer for that matter, provides its customers an opportunity to experience their products in a unique way on digital

platforms,” Mr. Casey said.

“If you cannot get them excited to come into the store, then you should at least be attempting to get them excited to engage with you digitally,” he said.

However, the industry will soon come out of the early phase of augmented reality, per Fallon’s Mr. Spicer said. Consumers are maturing and demanding more utility.

Augmented reality does not just have to be showy, but it should solve a problem as well.

For example, appliance manufacturer Jenn-Air has an augmented reality iPhone app designed to let consumers envision branded appliances in their homes.

On the app, consumers can take pictures of their kitchens and replace their old furniture with a Jenn-Air appliance, locate showrooms and contact the brand ([see story](#)).

“It is actually about putting the product in your life, which I think is the untapped potential that we are just starting to realize,” Mr. Spicer said. “It can be more useful as a real way to feel out the shopping experience.

“Monetization happens when it is a part of the catalog, and then it becomes a true shopping experience,” he said.

Final Take

Tricia Carr, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York