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Luxury brand mobile use must shift from marketing to experience: Vibes exec

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By TRICIA CARR

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A Vibes executive who spoke during a Luxury Daily webinar yesterday said that thinking beyond advertising and marketing is vital to luxury brand mobile use and marketers should take advantage of the devices' capabilities to enhance their product.

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During the “What Apple’s offense means to luxury brands, retailers and rivals” webinar, executives discussed how the technology brand’s innovation and product usage habits are paving the way for luxury marketers to become a larger part of their target audience’s life. At this point, it is vital that marketers work diligently to develop a seamless experience on all digital channels, using the iPhone, iPad and other devices as a stepping off point for design and ease of use.

“Luxury brands must have a preference for iOS devices – think of it as a gathering of their target market,” said Jack Philbin, president/CEO of [Vibes Media](#), Chicago.

“Apple is enabling luxury marketers to have that relationship with customers and be there throughout the entire life cycle of that relationship,” he said.

“It is about how can you use that technology to enhance the product and not just to support a transaction.”

Cross-channel catalyst

The webinar panelists discussed Apple as the ultimate catalyst for innovation and what this means for luxury marketing and retail.

Apple exists in a way that is valuable for luxury brands as well as consumers, per Scott Forshay, mobile and emerging technologies strategist for [Acquity Group](#), Austin, TX.

Apple's products are all about user experience. They also marry technology and liberal arts, which are important for luxury marketers.

It is not technology for technology's sake, but something more strategic coming from Apple.

“The real issue we've faced since the advent of digital is that it is very difficult to replicate the essence of the luxury brand experience,” Mr. Forshay said.

The executives also deliberated if Apple products such as the iPhone, iPad, iTunes store and MacBook Air are redefining mobile.

There is one common design, but different reasons for use. This creates a seamless experience for users.

Other technology devices seem to break up this experience through inconsistencies.

“I don't see them as multiple lines, but a seamless experience with each device solving a unique use case,” Mr. Forshay said.

Apple also gives consumers a different way to consume content on the go, per Tom O'Regan, chief revenue officer of [Martini Media](#), New York.

Over the last couple of days in the Tristate area comprising New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, the major means of communication was on these devices in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy.

Content consumption rates are high on the iPhone and iPad. Consumers are communicating in a way that was not possible just a few years ago.

Brands and publishers have been capitalizing on this content consumption since it allows for a more interactive canvas, especially for affluent consumption.

However, luxury marketers have been slow to adopt mobile.

“Luxury marketers have been slow to adopt a lot of this, but I think they are looking to cut through the clutter now,” Mr. O'Regan said. “In 2013, we'll see more innovation in incorporating this content and different interactivity.”

Competitor landscape

Meanwhile, the executives discussed how marketers can make sense of the competitor

landscape.

Brands such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Samsung, Dell, Nokia, Research In Motion and Hewlett-Packard are looking to answer to Apple's iPhone and iPad.

It is difficult to create so many formats for each mobile effort, especially for luxury marketers who are just dipping their toes, per Mr. O'Regan.

"Solutions are largely based on Apple products," Mr. O'Regan said. "It's easier, it's simpler and there is a barrier of entry for these products that is more appealing."

Though other marketers such as Amazon are offering compelling products at competitive prices, Apple is setting the pace of change in the tablet market.

"It is going smaller, faster and better, and some will have to quickly follow suit just to see the market," Vibes' Mr. Philbin said.

Apple seems to be the most distinguished brand in its category because it has created a product ecosystem, per Patrick Frend, managing director at [Razorfish](#), New York.

"The real race that all these guys are trying to get to is based on ecosystem," Mr. Frend said. "Apple, more than any other brand, has created an ecosystem of devices that plug into all different areas of life."

Moreover, luxury marketers that want to reach the affluent audience via the Apple ecosystem must understand consumer behavior on each device.

The capabilities of each one are very different.

"Though responsive design is big in the industry now, I think it is really how you are thinking about the different features and functionally, and not just about resizing content," Mr. Frend said. "Some devices are more transactional and on-the-go, while consumers sitting on the couch with their iPad are consuming more content."

In addition, luxury is about the in-store experience, per Acquity Group's Mr. Forshay.

Luxury marketers that want to use mobile to drive store traffic must understand what makes each medium unique.

"It is about understanding awareness and context, and understanding where consumers are, what time it is, or even what year it is," Mr. Forshay said. "Then we can leverage all of this information that is timely and relevant, with an understanding of context."

Final Take

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