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How to market and sell to mobile shoppers this holiday season

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As the critical holiday season is upon us, brands are working overtime to capture consumer attention across multiple channels to drive sales.

One channel, in particular – mobile – is poised to take prominence this year as more consumers connect in more places from more devices than ever before.

In addition to their growing numbers, mobile shoppers are spending more and creating larger shopping carts through mobile channels such as the tablet. As a result, the mobile shopper is clearly this season's most coveted consumer for luxury brands.

Reaching the most coveted consumer

According to the National Retail Federation 2012 Holiday Consumer Spending Survey, more than half of those who own smartphones (52.9 percent) and almost two-thirds of those who own tablets (64.1 percent) plan to use their devices to research and purchase holiday gifts, décor, food items and more.

With the number of U.S. tablet users expected to reach nearly 70 million this year, up from 34 million in 2011, according to eMarketer, this particular segment of mobile shoppers is increasingly important for brands and retailers.

To attract tablet users, retailers and brands need to understand how these shoppers are different from those shopping from a desktop, laptop or smartphone.

Tablet shoppers tend to be more affluent, have higher average order values and, most importantly, spend more time interacting with retail brands because they typically use their tablets during idle hours, such as when they are watching television or relaxing in bed.

These tablet shoppers are more likely to make impulse purchases and shop for luxury items, compared to non-tablet owners. Most importantly, they demand a different type of shopping experience – one that is rich, immersive and engaging.

Thankfully, the tablet was made for prestige brands. Its portability, combined with ample real estate and great functionality, provides the perfect platform for brand discovery, affinity and advocacy.

So how can luxury retailers and brands reach this most coveted shopper this holiday season? By following these key steps:

Create an omni-channel branded experience

Since consumers of luxury brands and retailers have high expectations, having an omni-channel branded experience is of utmost importance.

A consistent merchandising and transactional experience across channels, from mobile and catalogs to computers and television, is critical for building strong customer engagement and loyalty as consumers increasingly expect to interact with brands from multiple touch points.

On omni-channel branded experience is also critical when it comes to consumer shopping preferences.

For example, according to a recent holiday shopping survey conducted by us, 40 percent of respondents still look to magazines and catalogs for gift ideas and inspiration, but 42 percent of them, interestingly, do not plan to make any purchases from these publications this year.

As a result, brands and retailers should provide the immersive, inspiring experience that shoppers get from catalogs across all of their shopping channels – Web, mobile and social – to reach their high-value shoppers via their preferred shoppable channel or risk losing these sales.

For example, luxury department store Neiman Marcus has evolved its traditional lookbook into a virtual shopping experience to provide that omni-channel branded experience to its customers.

Optimize for mobile

Our survey also found that, across mobile devices, 63 percent of the online shoppers surveyed plan to shop using online catalogs, gift guides and lookbooks, coming ahead of social media channels.

This demand for online content from an ever-increasing number of mobile shoppers, combined with the existing high expectations of the luxury shopper, illustrates the need for brands and retailers to optimize their content for mobile.

This not only enables them to maximize the revenue potential of their customers' preferred channels and devices, but also ensures the customers do not go elsewhere as a result of a poor or lackluster mobile experience.

Understand the role of discovery commerce

Since its debut, the tablet has proven itself to be a device that inspires people to shop.

Compared to sitting at a computer, where shopping is more deliberate and purposeful, the tablet provides a more relaxed environment for easy browsing. As such, the tablet lends itself to discovery commerce, facilitating the uncovering of more products.

The luxury segment, which is adept at creating exceptional brand experiences and adding high value to their offerings, must use content to take advantage of the "discovery" tablets provide in order to encourage consumers to interact with brands.

The key is to lure customers towards a brand interaction by offering something of value in exchange for their audience's valued attention, interest, commitment or loyalty. The ultimate goal of this effort is to provide a seamless experience from discovery to purchasing, enabling the retailer or brand to capture the sale.

For example, Harper's Bazaar recently partnered with American Express to launch ShopBazaar, an online store enabling readers to move from the inspiration of seeing desirable items in the magazine's pages to acquiring them in a fully integrated experience, directed in its entirety by its editors.

Carol A. Smith, the magazine's vice president, publisher and chief revenue officer, described the new offering this way: "With ShopBazaar we've expanded our range to engage the luxury shopper in a terrific ecommerce experience, with our editors' best-of-the-best selections, impeccable service and an effortless checkout."

Ensuring holiday success

By having a better understanding of the opportunities the tablet provides, as well as how U.S. consumers plan to shop this holiday season, luxury brands and retailers can position themselves for a successful holiday season.

Delivering an immersive experience across channels, particularly via the mobile medium, will enable these companies to realize maximum revenue potential while reaching consumers wherever they are.

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