

MULTICHANNEL

## Value beyond the product is a priority in fashion retail: NRF speaker

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By TRICIA CARR

NEW YORK - Luxury fashion retailers should consider the areas in which they can credibly be seen as an authority and create quality content that allows them to strike a balance of commercial integration to gain trust from their target audience, according to a speaker at the National Retail Federation's Retail's Big Show.

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During the "The Changing Rules of Fashion in the Digital Age" session, the founder of creative agency Wednesday discussed the three truths that today's high-end fashion retailer's must consider to reach its target audience on the branding, social and operational levels. In addition to meaningful content, retailers should consider two additional truths: brands are part of a broader cultural context and there is a single brand experience between online and offline.

"It is not so much the technology, and not so much the machine, but more about the people and how they use that technology and those machines and drive opportunities in what they do," said Oliver Walsh, founder of Wednesday, New York.

Founded in 2009, [Wednesday](#) has worked with luxury brands and retailers such as Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, Giorgio Armani and Mr Porter.

## Editorialized branding

The first truth in fashion retail is that a brand should add value to a customer's life through more than the product.

The more consumers trust the brand and the more authority exuded by the brand, the more commercial success the brand will experience.

One way that brands can assert their authority on an appropriate subject is through editorial content.

For instance, Wednesday worked with men's online retailer Mr Porter to create the brand experience. The agency went into the project with a strong point of view – to think like the typical customer – with a goal of positioning the retailer as the global authority on men's style.

Another luxury brand effort with a seemingly noncommercial intent is Louis Vuitton's Amble city guides.

The French fashion house eyes affluent travelers via its Amble with Louis Vuitton iPhone application. It is designed to encourage travelers to save favorite travel destinations and to take personal pictures, notes, videos and sounds along their journey ([see story](#)).

These efforts allow consumers to live a better life, per Mr. Walsh.

Marketers can also use entertainment to drive connections with consumers such as shoppable videos.

Overall, brands should consider the areas in which they can credibly be seen as the authority, create quality content or services that reflect the brand value, strike the right balance of commercial integration and consider how the right content partners can act as a catalyst.

"Content is a utility," Mr. Walsh said. "It allows us to be a facilitator, and it allows us to be an enabler."

"We can impact the lives of our customers and our fans in ways that we never have before," he said.



*Mr. Walsh*

### Counting channels

The next truth in fashion retail is to consistently activate the brand by considering its broader cultural context.

Brands are part of communities beyond their control. Social is here and it makes an impact, per Mr. Walsh.

Burberry is the high-end example of social success. The British label took advantage of social channels and made changes across all areas of the business according to its social-driven strategy.

Indeed, driving awareness is driving sales. People who engage with a brand online tend to spend more money than others.

Marketers should understand what they have permission to talk about, identify the platform that is appropriate for the message and create an infrastructure to consistently engage on social networks.

Furthermore, marketers should not be afraid to take risks. If the effort is true to the brand, marketers should not be afraid to be disruptive.

"The customer is more empowered than ever before," Mr. Walsh said. "Social media is one of the most important parts of customer relationship management."

The last truth of fashion retail is to deliver a singular brand experience online and offline.

Customers do not see the customer experience as online or offline, but they only see the brand as whole.

There is no single customer journey, but multiple journeys that get them to the purchase.

Also, customers have new expectations across all channels that are a result of mainstream digital retailers who have raised the bar in service such as Amazon and its Zappos subsidiary.

Retailers should adopt a cross-channel retail experience by treating the customer as an individual, knowing where they are in the journey, investing in tools and resources that allow them to exploit big data, creating a better product experience online that builds on the offline experience and testing and learning in real time.

"Burberry is very much a pioneer in anything in the high-end luxury digital space," Mr. Walsh said. "It is about getting a really deep understanding of your customer and getting a deep understanding of your product at the same time."

#### Final Take

*Tricia Carr, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York*

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