

INTERNET

New Facebook message platform a game-changer for luxury brands

November 17, 2010



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Facebook's new message platform has implications for luxury brands

Facebook's new message platform breaks down the wall between email and social media with the potential to reap significant rewards for luxury marketers who can master the ecosystem.

Because luxury brands rely on word-of-mouth, and because social media can provide a more personal touch compared to other more unidirectional modes of communication, Facebook presents valuable opportunities to build brand cachet. The social network's messaging updates create new promotional opportunities on the platform, and at the same time represent an inflection point in the history of direct marketing strategy.



“To the degree that [Facebook] has created a unified approach, and the fact that there are so many wealthy consumers on Facebook – could represent a great vehicle for communication,” said Milton Pedraza, chief executive officer of the Luxury Institute, New York. “A lot of luxury consumers are already fans of different brands on Facebook, and it has worked pretty well.

“As Facebook becomes a world and medium where not only can you have fan pages but also therefore the ability to target more finely, I think this additional vehicle could be very powerful for luxury brands,” he said.

“There are more ways to communicate both within the community and outside, making it a very powerful potential vehicle.”

How it works

The new messaging platform will combine SMS, chat, email and traditional Facebook messages into one unified inbox, according to a [Nov. 15 post](#) on Facebook’s blog.

The email component of the integrations works by way of personal @facebook.com email addresses.

All messages are organized in consolidated streams of communication sorted by sender.

The additions to Facebook’s messaging platform let members communicate outside of the social network using SMS or email.

The new system promotes short, informal messaging, according to social and interactive marketing firm 360i.

Messages do not have subject lines, CC or BCC options and conversations are managed in real time.

The system will use a two-tiered system for presenting messages in members’ inboxes.

The default inbox screen will show only messages from friends and friends of friends, while a second “Other” folder will include all other correspondences.

Chat history across all media can be maintained in an archive on Facebook.

Pros and cons

Social media provides an invaluable tool in the modern media ecosystem for connecting with current and potential customers, according to several industry experts ([see story](#)).

Many luxury brands have taken to Facebook as a versatile tool for communicating directly with consumers and maintaining an ongoing dialogue.

Brands such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana all have more than one million Facebook fans and push content out through the platform regularly.

Meanwhile, email has also been a mainstay of most upscale brand marketers' online strategies for some time.

By colliding the social space and email, Facebook is making explicit — and hopes to address — a shift in media consumption that has gained greater visibility over time, according to Dave Lewis, chief marketing officer of Message Systems, Columbia, MD.

People are moving across media boundaries in their day-to-day interactions, while marketers often plan their marketing initiatives as if those channels existed in isolation.

On the one hand, Facebook's messaging upgrades does present the possibility of reaching the platform's 500 million users in one central location.

Depending on the adoption of the @facebook.com accounts, and depending on how those accounts are used, Facebook could become an email titan.

In fact, the new messaging system has been colloquially referred to as the "Gmail killer."

However, from a marketing standpoint, the platform does have its limitations.

For one, the tiered organization system means that brands could find their email communications eschewed by consumers who choose to ignore all those messages not from friends.

Furthermore, the absence of subject lines an extra bit of text that could be used to draw customers in, meaning that brand name cachet assumes elevated importance.

Thirdly, because every instance of communication is collected together, inconsistencies or glaring redundancies in a marketer's messaging can be spotted quickly.

The rigorous application of database management and customer relationship marketing becomes that much more important in such an ecosystem, according to Mr. Pedraza.

What's next?

The concept of a social network that can be everything to all people – facilitating and concentrating chat, email, SMS and Facebook communication in one place – is an alluring one.

However, the scope and severity of the change depends on a number of factors, foremost among them the speed and nature of the new messaging platform's adoption.

"The question is: Will affluent consumers change their habits?," said the Luxury Institute's Mr. Pedraza. "Will they leave Gmail or Yahoo and turn to @facebook.com predominantly?"

"If it becomes a highly used, unified medium, then, yes, there's a great opportunity to do marketing," he said. "Once it has the absorption rate, it could be a great marketing vehicle."

"That remains to be seen."

In one regard at least, luxury brands should probably continue to engage fans as they already have on Facebook – updating their fan pages.

Because News Feed updates are not affected directly by the new messaging platform, updates to fan pages will still reach consumers who have signaled interest in brands on Facebook.

When push comes to shove, quality content that can effectively engage brand advocates is vital.

“This latest news underscores the importance of having an engaged fan base on Facebook,” said David Berkowitz, senior director of emerging media and innovation at 360i, New York. “Brands that have massive Facebook fan bases and continually optimize their messaging to stay relevant will continue to have an open communications channel with consumers.

Brave new digital world

Whatever the case may be, the development makes clear that the evolution of messaging has reached an inflection point, according to Message System's Mr. Lewis.

Once-sound tactics demand refining – or may simply need to be scrapped altogether.

A new set of best practices will emerge that most likely emphasizes much more tightly integrated multichannel marketing strategies.

“The Facebook announcement is a manifestation of something we’ve been talking about for quite some time,” Mr. Lewis said. “It’s not about a single channel of digital messaging any more – email or text or instant messaging.

“It’s about the combination of all those channels and how we utilize all of them interchangeably,” he said. “What it represents to me is that the future of digital messaging has arrived in a very real way.

“For marketers, it means that they have to break their addiction to a single channel view of the world.”

Final Take

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