

INTERNET

Rent the Runway exec claims post-purchase engagement promotes repeat ecommerce

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By JEN KING

NEW YORK – A senior executive from luxury rental retailer Rent the Runway at the Luxury Interactive 2013 conference said that engaging consumers after the first sale boosts ecommerce sales.

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Luxury Daily

The executive explained during the “Follow-Up Sale: Personalizing Your Post-Purchase Customer Communications” panel how the retailer continuously engages consumers. Brands and retailers without bricks-and-mortar locations must use engagement and personalization tactics to make up for the lack of an in-store experience.

“When it comes to renting designer dresses online, there’s a lot of fear and apprehension from consumers,” said Angie Gentile, director of brand marketing at [Rent the Runway](#), New York.

“To address these apprehensions, we use personalized communications across all channels,” she said.

“After someone’s first rental, we try to go above and beyond to create a Cinderella moment.”

Digital fairy godmother

Without an in-store experience, a digitally based brand must go further than a bricks-and-mortar retailer to ensure that consumers have an enjoyable experience.

Ms. Gentile said that the best customer engagement strategy for repeat purchases is personalization.

Two weeks after the rental, Rent the Runway uses personalized target emails in a post-rental email exchange. During this exchange, consumers are offered promotions to inspire another rental.

These emails are personalized through dress size, body type and brands rented during prior rentals. By leveraging this data set, the consumer is encouraged to browse ten similar dress styles.

The experience of the consumer is important throughout the rental process.

Due to the apprehensions associated with a rental, Rent the Runway has a team of stylists called Go-To Girls that is available via online chat, email or phone to aid the consumer in selecting the best dress to rent.

Post-sale, Rent the Runway looks at the data of its consumers to better understand their behavior for improved performance in the future.



Rent the Runway's Angie Gentile, far left

Rent the Runway looks at spend levels, rental frequency and membership start date to better engage with consumers.

The online retailer enhances the first-time rental experience by including a Fit Kit with products meant to help the consumer get ready for her event as well as personalized Go-To Girl emails.

As a way to maintain the interest of consumers, Rent the Runway engages consumers on an emotional level through its photo review option. Meant to be “fashion karma” for the consumer, this also serves as a selling point for the retailer.

The photos show the consumer in a rental dress at a special event to create an emotional

connection that may inspire an additional rental.

The recommendation search engine is also personalized, based on browsing history and past rental behavior. In addition to dress size, age and body type, this shows the consumer other options for rental. This function is ideal for Rent the Runway to display that its services are not only for formal events.

Online storefront experience

Brands and retailers are tying together digital and bricks-and-mortar experiences to create a total experience that appeals to all types of shoppers.

For example, a senior executive from Saks Fifth Avenue at the Luxury Interactive 2013 conference shared the retailer's strategy to amplify consumer experiences in-store by physically replicating its digital presence.

The executive spoke about Saks' in-store technology tactics used to enhance the consumer experience during the "Using In-store Tech to Link the Online and Offline Experience" fireside chat. The use of technology in bricks-and-mortar retail locations allows for better consumer engagement, while displaying consumer behavior for the retailer's use ([see story](#)).

For a digital brand, creating the customer service atmosphere of an in-store experience is important. This can be achieved through curated looks created by a personal stylist.

"We've tested the more human angle during up-sale pushes with accessories," Ms. Gentile said.

"Time passes between rental and delivery and we try to keep them engaged during this time because they are excited about an upcoming event," she said.

"Our Go-To Girls will offer 'mystery bling' with an order during this time as a way to tie the look together."

Final Take

Jen King, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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