

COLUMNS

Luxury brands must bring back romance in their customer relationships

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There is something special about the courting period of a budding romance, from the surprise and delight of small gestures to grander expressions of love and adoration.

The relationship between a luxury brand and its consumer is not all that different.

Luxury brands have the difficult task of intriguing the affluent consumer and keeping them coming back for more.

To make things more challenging, the holiday season puts enormous pressure on marketers to develop a successful strategy to entice shoppers. The goal is often to maintain luxury positioning, without resorting to discount tactics and sales.

Consider approaching your marketing goals by channeling the feeling of a new romance.

Here are three basics of romance to keep in mind when crafting your luxury marketing strategies, especially around the holidays.

1. Love at first sight

How special it feels to have butterflies fluttering around your stomach every time you make

eye contact with a budding romantic interest.

Just as people can go gaga from gazing at their new love, so too can shoppers feel connected to a luxury brand through visuals.

To make shoppers fall in love and visualize themselves with your brand during the holiday season, tap into tools outside the conventional advertising space.

How lucky we are to be marketers in a time when there are so many resources.

Consider augmented reality applications that allow consumers to virtually try on product, social media sites with a heavy focus on photo and video, or even MMS and tablet solutions.

Tiffany and Co. is a great example of a luxury brand expanding photo engagement beyond in-store signage, posters and magazine ads, and into the social space. The jewelry brand incorporates photos into 80 percent of all Facebook posts.

Tiffany also launched a Tumblr campaign last holiday season to announce the 175th Legendary Gemstones anniversary collection.

The jeweler wanted to create buzz on a new engagement channel to better engage with their customers where they were: online.

Using a Tumblr page not only offered customers a new medium for viewing product, but also positioned Tiffany as a curator, compiling imagery to craft the perfect Tiffany aesthetic: classic, clean, lovely and timeless.

Cartier is another strong example of a luxury brand tapping into unique visual engagement tactics around the holidays.

For the 2012 holiday season, Cartier took visual engagement to the next level through the Winter Tale video campaign, featuring Cartier holiday product and showcasing beautiful jewelry that shoppers could purchase as gifts for loved ones.

Cartier tapped into video as a creative way to make a unique experience for brand loyalists to peruse the holiday collection in the comfort of their own home.

2. Surprise and delight

A new romance is one of the few times in our lives when we are showered with surprises and gifts for no reason at all, other than the fact that someone special appreciates us.

Brands too can tap into the joy of feeling special – especially during the gift-giving season – by going the extra mile to show customers that they are valued.

In addition to common “surprise and delight” tactics such as delivering an unexpected gift in the mail, luxury brands can boost digital engagement by providing loyal customers with keys to unlock exclusive digital content.

And specific to the affluent demographic, delivering a unique experience that is highly personalized, or that “money can’t buy” is often more impressionable than something that

the shopper could pick up on her own.

The holiday season is likely the most popular time for charitable campaigns. Luxury brands can turn giving into a full circle tactic by rewarding site visits or social sharing with charitable donations.

While the trick may be in aligning your brand to the most appropriate cause, you will show your customers that your brand cares.

3. Getting in with the friends

The major test when dating a new person is to get the green light from their close friends. This is not all that different in the luxury marketing space.

Luxury marketers can make huge strides by tapping into social as a channel to engage with their target audience.

By using their shoppers' social engagement as a tool to further marketing efforts, the power of word of mouth marketing is at work.

Pinterest is a great example of an interactive social channel finding a particular niche adoption in the luxury space.

In a comScore study, data found that Pinterest users follow an average of 9.3 retailers on the site, compared with 8.5 by Twitter users, and 6.9 by Facebook users.

Neiman Marcus recently completed a Pinterest campaign geared at rewarding its dedicated social followers by offering an exclusive Rebecca Minkoff handbag, available for pre-sale only on their Pinterest page, before availability in any stores.

The exclusive offering drew in an overwhelming amount of success, including a 20 percent increase in pinning, a 35 percent increase in repinning from the Neiman Web site, and overall nearly 3,000 new Neiman Marcus Pinterest followers.

Not only did the retailer significantly boost a new powerful channel to reach and engage with their customers, but also delighted brand loyalists with the opportunity to receive a product available to no others anywhere. If that is not love, what is?

LIKE A NEW crush, luxury marketers need to make their customers feel like they are constantly on their minds.

You also want shoppers to fall head over heels with your brand during the holidays.

Trick is, we do not want to seem over the top – one of the major dating no no's.

To combat this, it is essential not to downplay or depreciate your brand in any way, but to maintain a respected, white-glove experience, especially throughout the hectic holiday season.

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