

MULTICHANNEL

Neiman Marcus, Bergdorf gear up for holidays with permanent free shipping

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Neiman Marcus Group is looking to revitalize its ecommerce before the holiday season's fervor begins by offering permanent free shipping and returns year-round for all domestic purchases made through neimanmarcus.com and bergdorfgoodman.com as well as at retail locations.

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By removing some of the burdens that deter consumers from shopping online, Neiman Marcus may see a surge in ecommerce. Additionally, Neiman Marcus Group's move demonstrates that retailers are still adjusting to the digital sphere and determining the right balance between in-store and online.

"The decision was motivated by listening to what our customers want from us," said Ginger Reeder, vice president of corporate communications for [Neiman Marcus](#), Irving, TX.

"We believe it will make it even easier for customers to shop online," she said.

Translating experience

Neiman Marcus and Bergdorf Goodman have tried many tactics to translate the in-store experience online and to make their omnichannel presence more cohesive.

For example, consumers in more than 100 countries can shop in their preferred currency with relevant duties and taxes accounted-for. The retailers have also established a replenishment service that allows consumers to receive beauty products at regular, pre-determined intervals.

Neiman Marcus has consolidated the content of each location so that a consumer can easily learn where a certain product is located if she prefers to shop in-store.



ZZ Ward in Helmut Lang for Neiman Marcus' Cusp events Sept. 26-29

Bergdorf Goodman's Web site was recently reconfigured to convey an editorial feel.

However, permanent free shipping seems to be a perk that will immediately resonate with many consumers. Not only does free shipping emulate the in-store experience, but it also lets consumers know that the brand is sympathetic to their shopping experience.

The emphasis of permanence may give this offer more impact than the typical limited-time offer.

Furthermore, ushering in this incentive during the holiday season is likely to harness traffic that may have selected another retailer offering free shipping.

Both retailers are broadcasting the news via social media.

Have you heard? We now offer Free Shipping & Returns - every day, in-store and online.

#FreetoIndulge : <http://BG.com/>



The image is a Facebook post graphic for Bergdorf Goodman. It features a dark blue background with white and red text. At the top, there are two white arrows pointing towards each other, with the word 'FREE' written inside each arrow. Below this, the text reads 'FEEL FREE TO have it ALL!' in a mix of serif and script fonts. Underneath, 'FREE SHIPPING' is written in large, bold, red capital letters, followed by 'and RETURNS EVERY day*' in white. Below that, 'Online & In-Store' is written in a smaller white font, followed by '#FREETOINDULGE' in red. At the bottom of the graphic, 'BERGDORF GOODMAN' is written in large, red, serif capital letters. Below the graphic, the Facebook interface shows 'Like · Comment · Share' and a notification icon with the number '2'. Below that, it says '26 people like this.'

Bergdorf Goodman Facebook page

"I don't see this as a strategy to migrate customers to online, but to remove a barrier from online shopping, the shipping fee," said Marie Driscoll, CEO and chief consultant at Driscoll Advisors, New York.

"[Shipping fees are] a high hurdle certainly for cosmetics and just not competitive with practices at Nordstrom, Saks and Bloomingdales," she said.

"Free shipping is expected and Neiman's probably lost sales because shoppers, even luxury shoppers, balk at paying shipping fees when they are purchasing high-priced goods."

High hurdles

While this offer may drive consumers online, Neiman Marcus is increasing efforts to bring consumers in-store.

For instance, Neiman Marcus introduced fashion and music-inspired activities Sept. 26-29 into its CUSP departments across the United States to boost and maintain the in-store presence of younger consumers.

The CUSP event revolved around the musicians ZZ Ward, Natalie Bergman of Wild Belle

and Noelle Scaggs of Fitz and The Tantrums, who each starred in individual promotional campaigns for CUSP products. To increase nationwide participation, the brand teamed up with Vogue to encourage fans to enter an Instagram sweepstakes for a chance to win a \$2,500 Neiman Marcus gift card ([see story](#)).

Other retailers are also strengthening in-store efforts.

For example, Saks Fifth Avenue boosted foot traffic to its New York flagship's redesigned fragrance floor through a series of fragrance-themed events intended to draw aspirational consumers.

The fragrance floor's redesign debuted Sept. 26 amid various events and giveaways that celebrated the occasion. Renovating a space can enliven a retailer's identity, while accompanying events can maximize exposure for the new area ([see story](#)).

As consumers turn more frequently to ecommerce for their purchases, retailers will continue to adapt.

"This should make a difference," Ms. Driscoll said. "Now she can buy and return for free, which should increase the likelihood that she will make a purchase she's not sure about.

"In an omnichannel world, if the purchase doesn't work out, she can return to the store where she may find an alternative," she said.

"In sum, this evens the playing field with other luxury competitors. An important move."

Final take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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