

IN-STORE

Standing out amid so much creativity: holiday window displays

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Since most luxury retailers are flaunting their creativity along the broad thematic canvas of the holiday season, what exactly constitutes an outstanding, traffic-driving window display?

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Christmas references, folk tales, high fashion, brand takeovers, mesmerizing juxtapositions and many more elements will find their way into the windows of luxury retailers this holiday season. Although from a macro view window displays can appear interchangeable, when up-close the attention to detail and increasing incorporation of technology convey distinct approaches.

"Window displays have been a longstanding tradition for retailers during the holiday season," said Dave Rodgers, a Toronto-based retail analyst and consultant.

"With new technologies like augmented reality, the ability to create new and interactive conditions that will enhance the experience and create new memories of holiday shopping," he said.

Discovering the new

The usual holiday trademarks such as Christmas trees, elves and reindeer are reliable for

driving traffic by appealing to consumers' desire for tradition.

London department store Harrods has centered its window displays on the Christmas Express. Each window display, framed in Christmas lights, acts as a train car with figures traveling along.

Structuring the windows in this way allows the retailer to depart from strictly Christmas elements, since the train's presence is continuously evoked.



Harrods Christmas Express window display

Like other retailers, Harrods understands that it can expect huge crowds with traditional displays.

"In Canada there have been two department stores that historically went all out to create window displays during the holiday season," Mr. Rodgerson said.

"The Bay and Eaton's, while not luxury brands, were definitely high-end and their holiday season displays became a destination and experience that families looked forward to seeing," Mr. Rodgerson said. "The Bay became well known for very creative windows that engaged shoppers with animatronics, think Disneyland, and beautiful displays celebrating the season."

Alternative views

Some retailers opt for the curated look of brand takeovers. Branded window displays can provide a contrast to a retailer's customary aesthetic.

Additionally, these partnerships can lead to further product development inside the store that engages consumers for longer.

French department store Printemps enlisted Italian fashion house Prada to give its Paris location's holiday windows a high-fashion touch.

The display, entitled "A Joyful Obsession," is a colorful creation that is classically Christmas with visual elements that evoke the Prada brand, including a bold black and white checkerboard pattern and teddy bears. The windows allow Prada to acquaint more

people with the brand's image and aesthetic in a memorable, joyous way ([see story](#)).



Prada's Printemps holiday window display

"Window displays have been a long-used marketing tool, but their purpose has evolved over time," said Taylor Rains, account executive at [Rawle Murdy Associates](#), Charleston, SC.

"Initially, a window display's success was measured by the street traffic it drove into the store," he said. "More recently, window displays were used as much for publicity as traditional marketing, with retailers going bigger and more elaborate with their work in an effort to draw attention.

"Now, however, it's all about engagement."

Technology trumps

Finding fresh ways to bring interactive technology into windows displays will have an impact on holiday shoppers. Rather than engaging a display from a fawning distance, interactive technology lets consumers climb over the artistic barrier.

"Incorporating new technology is an increasingly important component for digital displays," Mr. Rains said. "Consumers get excited about trying new things.

"More importantly, new technology allows for retailers to quantify the success of their campaigns, making it easier to know what works and what doesn't," he said.

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is giving visitors to its Manhattan flagship's upcoming holiday windows the opportunity to become part of the display through a new mobile site.

Opening Nov. 25, the windows this year tell the story of the Yeti, which is rumored to live on top of the Saks Fifth Avenue building in New York making snowflakes. Saks is working in conjunction with MasterCard and The Science Project on the mobile site that allows users to create their own Yeti name, customize a snowflake and flick it up from their phone or tablet onto screens in the display ([see story](#)).



Saks Fifth Avenue's 2012 window displays

The range, depth and novelty of touchpoints depends on the retailer's ambition.

"One of The Bay's recent initiatives was to create an interactive window that would allow shoppers to use touch sensitive, light technologies to take a picture of themselves superimposed against a holiday scene, even though they were standing outside the window on the sidewalk," Mr. Rodgerson said.

"The clever aspect of this promotion was that to pick up your free holiday picture, you had to walk through the store to pick it up," he said.

"Since the main floor of the store took up a full city block, you would have to pass through a number of departments featuring holiday gift promotions that were bound to attract your attention as you made your way to pick up your high tech 'selfie' commemorating your visit to the venerable retailer."

Achieving originality can be challenging when dealing with the same theme each year. However, consumers will likely be pleased if a space is set aside for their voice to be heard.

"Retailers are trying to drive conversation and interaction with their displays," Mr. Rains said.

"As such, an outstanding window display today is one that draws passersby and allows them to get involved, either through social sharing or alternate means of digital interaction."

Final take

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