

MULTICHANNEL

## Luxury brands must risk failure to succeed in new media: Morpheus exec

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By PETER FINOCCHIARO

NEW YORK – Luxury brands have made great strides on the Internet, but still need to experiment with their social and mobile media messaging to learn necessary best practices, according to an executive at Morpheus Media.



The luxury sector was slow to make headway on the Internet as brands such as Marc Jacobs and Donna Karan have just recently launched ecommerce. While some high-end marketers seem determined to learn from their experiences on the Web and adopt new media marketing strategies involving social and mobile media, fear of the unknown is an obstacle that could leave many luxury companies in the dust, according to Shenan Reed, cofounder and managing director of [Morpheus Media](#), New York

“What’s happening to the world of luxury on the media side is very exciting,” Ms. Reed said. “The thing is, you have to be willing to fail.”

“Someone once said that advertising agencies are only as creative as their clients are brave,” she said. “Clients have to step up and do things that are engaging and interactive and different.”

Ms. Reed was part of a Fashion 2.0 panel, titled “The Rise of Luxury Brands Online” and

moderated by Yuli Ziv, cofounder of MyItThings.com and StyleCoalition.com, New York.

Other panelists were Maureen Mullen, digital marketing consultant at [L2 Think Tank](#), New York; Dara Fleischer, director of business development at [BeyondTheRack.com](#), New York; and Gloria McPike-Tamlyn, adjunct professor at [LIM College](#), New York.

## Online

Ms. Reed said that fear amongst luxury marketers certainly played a role in what has been perceived as the sector's slow and lackluster adoption of Web offerings. However, she said that cultural factors also played a role.

Many European luxury brands originally built Web sites for European consumers, who navigate the Internet much differently than those stateside.

European Web browsers are interested in more immersive and richly developed experiences, so luxury brands developed flash-heavy sites with beautiful and evocative media content.

However, U.S. consumers want a more navigable and utilitarian Internet experience, and responded poorly to the more leisurely structure of high-end-brand Web sites.

Additionally, the more media-intensive sites were harder to index in search engines.

The experience of poor U.S. reception has led many, if not most, luxury brands to retool their Web strategies to create more streamlined and commerce-oriented Web offerings.

## Social

Social media is becoming an important component of marketing communication.

In particular, Facebook is becoming an imperative piece of brand strategy, according to L2's Ms. Mullen.

"Look at the traffic driven to sites across the Internet [from Facebook]," Ms. Mullen said. "The number's are really compelling.

"If you're not there and not acquiring likes, you will be left behind," she said. "People only follow so many brands."

Likewise, Twitter is becoming a go-to platform for engaging consumers.

Multiple panelists weighed the pros and cons of corporate oversight versus fluidity in posting to the ubiquitous microblogging site.

Louis Vuitton was singled out as a brand whose twitter feed seemed too hermetic and controlled, whereas Donna Karan's DKNY Girl feed was recognized as a apt use of the platform for its frequent, natural and responsive communications.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Choo was singled out for its "Catch A Choo" campaign that offered the first Foursquare users to check-in at various locations across London free sneakers and engaged several thousand participants.

Still, the overall message was that brands need to be willing to make the investment, which is not insignificant when factoring in human capital costs.

“Anything that happens in the social media space is a commitment, not a campaign,” Morpheus’ Ms. Reed said. “You can’t do it for six weeks and then step away.

“As soon as you engage a customer, if they sign up and said they want to talk, and you never say anything, that’s a problem,” she said. “The time to engage is the time when you’re actually ready to commit and have something valuable to offer to the consumer.

“If you’re creating value and committed to the long haul, good.”

## Mobile

The panelists agreed that the mobile space is a nascent field ripe with opportunities for adventurous luxury brands willing to take risks.

Because consumers seem glued to their mobile phones, brands now have the opportunity to target them wherever they are.

The medium gives marketers the opportunity to both engage consumers in a dialogue and collect much more specific data about potential customers.

However, few luxury brands have fully embraced the possibilities yet.

L2’s Ms. Mullen said that flash sale sites have done the best job in the luxury sector of developing strong mobile offerings.

However, the industry as a whole has not yet moved past mobile offerings intended solely as branding vehicles into more commerce-oriented territory.

Just as with Web sites and social media, experience is crucial to gaining an understanding of how to target consumers in the mobile space.

“If you start advertising and you have a mobile site, you can start tracking analytics and find out what consumers are responding too and how behaviors differ on different phones and platforms,” Ms. Mullen said. “You can start learning and get way ahead of the curve in terms of how you’ll adapt your strategy to giving the consumers what they want.”

## Final Take

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