

COLUMNS

Apple, Burberry and Sephora in the new digital fantasy world

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By [Darin Archer](#)

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For every woman makeup is an emotional object. It is a way of assuming a new identity, becoming a more perfect version of yourself, standing out from the crowd, and at the same time being a member of the crowd, only better. It is the ultimate fantasy, and Sephora has perfected that fantasy.

A visit to a Sephora store is an event, a world of lights and scents, of salespeople offering tempting colors to try. And it should be an event: what could be more thrilling than self-transformation? The excitement that Sephora creates makes the possibility of self-perfection seem just that much more real.

Polishing Apple

It is interesting that Sephora has introduced iPads into this fantasy world. Julie Bornstein, head of Sephora Digital, is reported as saying, “Our beauty experts can pull up relevant information on products and makeup techniques, giving us the ability to cater the shopping experience to you. Mobile devices simply give more power to the consumer.”

Sounds as if the iPads are a little like the helpful mice and birds in Cinderella.

The presence of iPads does more than give customers a feeling of being catered to.

Sephora knows that most of its customers are Apple fans, and that it can create an exciting in-store digital experience while associating themselves with a brand their customers love, a tactic that is not at all unusual in branding today.

The association benefits Apple and Sephora both, increasing the coolness quotient all around.

Apple is doing more than partnering with other brands to solidify its position as a luxury brand itself. Its hiring of Burberry CEO Angela Ahrendts is widely seen as indicative of Apple's interest in luxury marketing.

In the trenches

Ms. Ahrendts is famous for her digital marketing makeover of Burberry, which under her direction became the most famously wired brand in fashion.

While head of Burberry she has fought to make the brand more exclusive, closing down unapproved licensing deals. Given the strong association that she fostered at Burberry between digital and luxury, it will be interesting to see how she fosters the luxury aspect of Apple products as a marketing technique.

The market where Apple's image is almost certain to undergo some interesting changes because of Ms. Ahrendts' new position? China.

Burberry has been superb at connecting with Chinese consumers, especially through digital marketing. Burberry is on four Chinese social media sites, and this year it ranked first for digital IQ among luxury brands in China.

Burberry itself is likely to remain a big presence in digital marketing. Ms. Ahrendts has been replaced by creative chief Christopher Bailey, who has worked with her since the mid-1990s. In 2011, a profile in Vogue called him a "pioneer in all things digital in the fashion industry."

IT IS EXCITING to speculate on what Mr. Bailey and Ms. Ahrendts will come up with next. Whatever it is, it will no doubt change digital marketing for luxury brands in general.

In five years, Sephora stores will probably be using digital in ways we cannot even imagine today, and visiting a Sephora store will be even more of a fantasy event.

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