

INTERNET

Social media needs to be organic to succeed

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Dior photo posted on Sina Weibo

By SARAH JONES

MEXICO CITY, Mexico - Luxury brands should work to create a more organic, personable social media presence to reach a younger consumer, according to a panel discussion May 12 at the FT Business of Luxury Summit.

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Many brands are still married to traditional media, and those that have embraced a more modern communication strategy tend to try to control it to the point where it seems forced. Content is the gate to engaging consumers, so it will pay for brands to loosen up their social media communication, making it more personable.

“I think social media is organic and I think some of the brands, because of the relationship with the headquarters, there is no freedom,” said Yi Zhou, art director for **Tudou** and ambassador for **Sina Weibo**.

“Social media is instant and you cannot control it with a media or marketing plan,” she said.

Launching pad

Social media provides an opportunity for emerging fashion brands that did not exist years

ago. For a brand to be successful before, it would need to have about five fashion editors at magazines interested in its work.

Now with social media, if consumers notice something, a brand can get recognition through the content they produce.

Acne Studios began as an advertising agency and film production company. Mikael Schiller, the executive chairman for Acne Studios, explained that he and his cofounder created jeans with red stitching to give out to family and friends as a public relations effort for the agency.



Acne Studio apparel

The founders then branched into ready-to-wear. Even with its origins as an ad agency, Acne has not done any traditional advertising.

Instead, the brand tries to drive a positive conversation by providing a good experience to all consumers. It also launched Acne Paper, a branded magazine, to reach consumers beyond a print ad.



Acne Paper cover

One way to get attention is through collaborations, but the panelists agreed that there is maybe too much of an oversaturation of partnerships between the fashion, design and art worlds. Both panelists said that these have to represent genuine mutual admiration between the parties and be authentic.

Ms. Zhou said that she is not a fan of bloggers, despite being called one herself.

Fashion brands tend to look to these style icons for partnerships, taking them on trips and involving them in store events, but she does not think that they represent arbiters of taste.



Harrods' Digital Style Summit brought together bloggers

Ms. Zhou pointed out Hermès as a western brand that creates personable, engaging social media. She mentioned the brand's Instagram account with still-life images of its products next to a computer or lunch, saying that she could see herself in the photos.



Instagram post from Hermès

Social expansion

Many luxury brands have embraced Sina Weibo's platform, recognizing the need for a separate channel to reach Chinese consumers, due to the country's censorship.

Mandarin Oriental hosted a month-long photo competition through May 7 with an application on the popular Chinese microblog site, Sina Weibo, to boost guest engagement throughout the region.

The “My Moments of Delight” invited guests to capture interesting moments at any of the brand's properties. Luxury brands continually turn to social platforms to host photo sharing contests that can drive fan engagement and yield useful user-generated content (see story).

Twitter offers brands the opportunity to speak directly to consumers and amplify what they are saying about the brand through retweets and replies. The most successful brands are

the ones that use this platform as a two-way communication tool ([see story](#)).

The panelists disagreed on whether brands which cannot manage to create organic social content should continue to do so anyway.

Mr. Schiller said that it would be better to just stop than have a strained social media presence.

Ms. Zhou, however, is a proponent of brands sticking with it.

“I think you should keep on doing and in time the organic aspect will emerge because social media will be more a part of our lives and more spontaneous,” Ms. Zhou said.

In the end, brands have to do what feels right for them, rather than allowing reports and figures to speak for them.

Mr. Schiller said that a few years ago, everyone was telling Acne it should open a store in China. But Acne chose not to because it did not get it for the brand.

“I think it’s really important to have your idea on why you do things, and not just look at a chart,” Mr. Schiller said. “I get lost when I do things that I think I should do rather than things I want to do.”

Final Take

Sarah Jones, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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