

HOME FURNISHINGS

5 ways for home brands to connect with luxury homeowners

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Art in the kitchen: Bertazzoni range. Designed by Hermann De Oliveira. Image credit: Bertazzoni

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Luxury homeowners are a discerning bunch. They expect the highest quality performance in the home brands they buy. Not only that, but they also demand a refined level of style. And, importantly for brands and retailers, they are more than willing to pay a premium for brands that meet their heightened expectations.

After 18 years of serving brands and retailers in the home space, North Carolina-based integrated brand experience agency [Mode set out to discover the home brands](#) that live up to their promises to these luxury-leaning customers through an extensive research study.

The survey combines a marketing audit conducted by an expert panel studying the company's branding and engagement with the perceptions of high-end consumers, including both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

The consumer sample included only high-income shoppers with household income of \$150,000 and above. It skewed more female, as they were determined to be the primary decision makers in the home and who were most experienced with the brands involved.

The results are a comprehensive study across 16 categories of functional home products no decorative home furnishings categories were included measuring 138 unique brands.

"We started with brands in the kitchen and worked out from there to include functional categories, like fans and lighting, grills, smart home devices, windows and doors, and faucets and bath," said John Pietrafesa, agency partner and creative director.

"We set out to measure what was measurable," he said.

Data played a key role.

"The results are more than 4,500 data points, which we combined and compressed into an index that levels the playing field across these many brands," said Tyler Hawes, Mode partner and digital director.

The brands were evaluated in four key areas, including brand systems (communications, image and positioning); physical extensions (retail presence, availability at retail, packaging); digital ecosystems (customer experience on Web site and social channels); and campaigns and content (how effectively the content and messaging supports premium positioning).

As a result, this study measures how effectively these brands are marketing and communicating with the potential high-spending customers.

"In the retail environment today, the customer journey has become so fragmented and the ecosystem so complicated, brands need to realize that this customer may be looking at a brand they never heard of before in a retail store," Mr. Pietrafesa said.

"But before picking it up, they are going to look at their phones or go online when they get home to learn more about it," he said. "As a result, that connectivity and brand messaging has never been so important."

Best-known luxury brands may not be living up to their promises

The biggest surprise found across the study is that the most well-known premium brands are often not the ones that rise to the top of their category. These brands may be resting on their laurels and counting on their legacy to pull them through to the market.

"One of the most interesting things we saw is that many of the most widely known and beloved brands are not executing well in different aspects of the brand experience," Mr. Pietrafesa said.

"There are a lot of upstart, challenger brands that are doing a better job communicating with this customer," he said.

Take the major home appliance category, where 18 brands were evaluated.

The highest-scoring appliance brand was Bertazzoni, a brand with which I was unfamiliar. Indeed, it was the highest-scoring brand across the entire spectrum studied.

Louis Poulsen in fans and lighting was the second-highest scorer at 91.1 points.

Bertazzoni, which scored 92.9 on a 100-point scale, was rewarded by both the expert and consumer panel for its effective communication of the brand's Italian heritage, its precision engineering and how its products fit into the consumers' luxury lifestyles.

By contrast, many appliance brands widely recognized as luxury, such as Sub-Zero/Wolf (67.1), Miele (64.4) and Viking (59.0), trailed far behind.

Viking, for example, was found lacking in its digital ecosystems and its physical extension into the retail space.

"This study is intended to help brands tell compelling stories cohesively across channels," Mr. Hawes said.

"What we found were huge opportunities for brands to do a better job in certain categories," he said. "They might be great on their Web site, for example, but inexplicably not carry that over into social media."

Or the premium positioning of the brand may come across digitally, but not at retail.

The Bertazzoni experience

Luxury home brands' keys to success

Looking at the brands that scored highest, such as Nespresso in coffee makers, Vitamix in small appliances, Weber for grills, Nest for smart home devices and Baldwin for door hardware, the Mode analysis identified five key values that elevated them in the ratings:

Brand voice and image are executed distinctly

Nespresso (86.2) exemplifies getting the brand voice and image right.

"Their packaging is incredibly appealing," a consumer respondent said. "It seems like they want the experience to begin when you open the box, not just when you taste the coffee."

Nespresso' packaging is perceived as sleek and high-end, resulting in consumers seeing it as the best product in the category, hands down.

Build stories around the key pillars of the premium mindset

Baldwin, the door hardware brand (81.7), is called out for taking a mundane product category and transforming it

Dauvill, the door hardware brand (81.7), is called out for taking a mundane product category and transforming it through heritage, design, construction, materials, function and performance into a luxury worthy of the homes of these discerning customers.

Maintain a consistent voice, which adjusting strategy for each channel

In the grill category, Weber (80.7) gets high marks for its digital ecosystem.

A consumer panelist noted: "Weber's Web site feels much more premium there are more ways to engage with it, which you don't expect from a Web site selling grills."

Create desire through experiences that speak to their customers' evolving relationships with their homes

Perhaps no product category speaks more to the luxury consumers' evolving relationships with their homes than the smart home category.

Nest (83.0) was the highest-scoring brand in this category, but newcomer Ecobee (81.6) was called out for its extension into the physical realm.

In this cutting-edge category where many customers have little to no hands-on experience, giving consumers a chance to touch, feel, try and learn about the products in the retail setting will become increasingly important.

Balance access, function and experience

Vitamix (80.2) gets points for delivering experiences that evoke quality and help guide consumers in their choice of products.

The brand's "Blender Recommender" is noted as an "inspired bit of utility" that makes shopping easier.



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