

MARKETING

## How print can help luxury brands connect with digital consumers

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**Research** has shown that, more than rational considerations or shared values, emotions are the most important factor for building brand affinity and driving lasting profitable relationships with consumers.

Luxury brands have always understood the role emotions play in shaping consumer behavior, and excel at creating physical experiences that resonate with their customers. Gucci's **pop-up apartment store** during Milan's design week, Ralph Lauren's **Polo Bar**, Herms's **Carr Club**, or Tiffany's **Blue Box Caf**.

But since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, in-store shopping has seen a sharp decline. And, beyond the pandemic, luxury consumers are changing.

Millennials will represent 50 percent of the global market for luxury goods by 2025, with Generation Z overtaking the market a short time later. And, **research** has shown that more of these younger consumers prefer to shop luxury goods online than in stores.

Although many luxury brands' instinctive reaction to the growing influence of these digital natives has been to invest aggressively in digital advertising, the most forward-thinking companies recognize two underappreciated truths about these generations:

1. They are hostile toward advertising, especially the invasive experiences that contribute to their sense of digital overwhelm
2. More than products or services themselves, younger generations of consumers seek authentic connections and luxury experiences.

In a world where many luxury consumers exclusively interact with brands online and, subsequently, on their doorsteps, how can luxury brands connect with customers in a way that cuts through the digital overwhelm and creates the authentic, emotional connections and luxury experiences they seek?

The answer is both cutting-edge and surprisingly analog: print.

Modern printing combines cutting-edge on-demand printing techniques with digital platforms similar to the content management systems (CMS) with which most marketing teams will be familiar. This combination offers brands an opportunity to marry the digital and physical worlds to create marketing materials that are both hyper-targeted and

opportunity to marry the digital and physical worlds to create marketing materials that are both hyper-targeted and also hyper-personalized.

#### Cut through the clutter

Investing in non-digital marketing in an increasingly digital world seems counterintuitive, but that is exactly the point more than **half of millennials** (56 percent) feel that technology overload makes their life more stressful, while **59 percent enjoy getting mail** from brands.

Consider also that **90 percent of direct mail** gets opened, versus fewer than 30 percent of emails.

As the coronavirus forces events to go virtual, printed invitations are an opportunity to add both intimacy and legitimacy. And in a moment when most brands are vying for consumers' attention online, direct mail has the potential to circumvent the digital clutter and connect with consumers at a critical moment.

#### Packaging that creates a connection

Product packaging can have a **profound impact** on consumer emotions. The **cognitive dissonance** consumers experience when luxury items a pair of Yeezys, for example come in packaging that is impossible to distinguish from the other packages on their front porch greatly reduces the likelihood of a repeat purchase or word-of-mouth advocacy.

Alternatively, custom packaging that includes personalized details and a look and feel that matches the price point of the purchase has the potential to create a strong emotional experience for the buyer.

#### Extend the post-purchase experience

After a purchase is made, brands have a unique opportunity to leverage print to immerse customers in their culture. In the period following their purchase of an SLS AMG, Mercedes-Benz sends customers an **elaborately packaged hardbound book** about the history and development of the high-performance vehicle.

Leveraging the technologies described above, luxury brands could send customers direct mail ranging from a handwritten note to an on-demand magazine automatically populated with relative content based on their purchase history, their interactions with the company's digital properties, and their trackable movements online.

This sophisticated level of personalization creates a moment of connection with customers with the potential to greatly increase brand loyalty.

#### Access to up-to-date data

The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation law, as well as consumers' increasing awareness of how data is collected and how it is used, have made accessing accurate customer data increasingly difficult.

Offering to send consumers a gift no matter how small in the mail is a high-success method for soliciting mailing information. The public's increasing comfort with technologies that link the physical and digital worlds, such as QR codes or RFID chips, give luxury brands the opportunity to instantly collect customer data from any number of other printed materials.

ALTHOUGH THESE are just a few examples of the use case for using print to extend the digital shopping experience, they speak to a larger need.

As the industry and its consumer base change, it will be increasingly challenging for luxury brands to connect with their customers.

By successfully marrying the digital and physical, brands can create experiences that resonate with consumers and build brand affinity.

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