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Key best practice for sales-oriented Web design

By Rachel Lamb, *Luxury Daily*,
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Luxury marketers must maintain a consistent brand image, keeping in mind aesthetics, customer service, option to purchase and performance in their mobile Web design strategy. Here are some best practices.

Brands must strive to keep their consumers happy with easy-to-navigate, functional and aesthetically pleasing Web sites. These can help drive sales both online and in retail locations.

“Luxury brands have the biggest challenge when going digital, because the aesthetics of their brand is a critical feature,” said Ofer Rubin, founder/CEO of [RealeyeZ3D](#), Ramat Gan, Israel. *“A good reason why so many luxury brands still aren’t crossing the digital divide to give customers an online experience is their fear of losing both the beauty and the emotional connection with customers that their brand’s beauty and style create in a live experience.*

“Aesthetics represents much more than beautiful looks for a luxury brand’s visualizations in the online market,” he said.



Looks do matter

Traditionally, luxury products are the most beautiful, dazzling and pleasing goods that consumers can purchase.

As a Web site is an extension of a brand’s overall message, it is important for brands to showcase these products the same as they would in a retail location.

Brands must keep up their reputation for excellence and beauty on the site. Fostering a personal connection to the brand has been an aesthetic challenge for luxury brands.

For example, Bulgari's zero1 site does a great job of engaging consumers with music, video and stunning images, Mr. Rubin said.



[Bulgari zero1 video](#)

User experience is a very important part of the aesthetics factor. Allowing a consumer to interact and have a personal experience with the brand online is as important as in more traditional shopping settings.

Photography is also very important when designing a Web site.

"Images that allow multi-views and zooming helps to put the consumer in a luxury environment," said Brian Grady, principal at Gorilla, a Web site developer based in Chicago.

A brand must add on aesthetic visualization and other styling features to create a complete user experience, a beautiful display for their beautiful items.

A product cannot achieve this by itself. A luxury product without a luxurious store environment will not be valued. Furthermore, the use of low-resolution images could potentially ruin the experience for a user, per [RealeyeZ3D](#)'s Mr. Rubin.

Excellent customer service

A second important best practice is excellent customer service.

In addition to a well-made product, luxury consumers also expect superb customer service in return for the premium that they are paying for upscale goods.

If a brand's Web site does not implement the same type of customer service regularly found in an upscale retail location, it could harm its image.

"Customer service alone is a huge barrier to any ecommerce site, especially with luxury brands," said Ethan Smith, creative director at Gorilla. "Luxury brands may need to think of ecommerce in a broader view than what others because someone who buys a luxury good expects more service, a more personal touch and a little more guidance through the sales process.

"They are used to being educated and guided and informed, and brands can accomplish that with a site if it's done right," he said.

Some brands, such as Tiffany & Co., offer consulting through their ecommerce sites.

Consumers can call a well-informed representative to ask questions or request suggestions, the kind of service that a customer would get at a Tiffany retail location.

Luxury buyers generally want help and reassurance when deciding whether or not to purchase a product. This is especially true in an online setting, where they cannot see or touch what they are considering buying.

Providing a comfortable and reassuring environment is mandatory for luxury brands trying to sell their products online, and having sales staff available via phone or tons of information available about products will help.

If consumers do not have the benefit of being about to experience or touch the product, then brands should make up for some of the luxury experience through customer service. It's absolutely essential to create a digital facsimile experience, Gorilla's Mr. Smith said.

Buying options

Another main feature that sites should have is purchase options.

High-resolution images of products, videos and digital shopping carts are necessities when trying to drive online purchases.

According to Gorilla's Mr. Grady, 57-60 percent of all purchases start online, and having videos that describe products can sway consumers to buy.

For ecommerce Web sites especially, videos can definitely add value to a site because they provide valuable product and brand information and can lead to more conversions

"Features that provide product information quickly, for example, help visitors make decisions efficiently, and in doing so increasing the Web site's usefulness and ultimately sales," [Realeyez3D](#)'s Mr. Rubin said.

For products that typically are not bought online, like cars, a store or dealership locator is useful so that consumers can easily find where to purchase, Gorilla's Mr. Grady said.

A mobile component is also an important feature to consider.

Brands whose sites are Flash-based or not optimized for mobile devices can lose sales from busy or on-the-go consumers who use their smartphones or tablets for buying.

But above all, performance is the No. 1 sales-driving feature of a Web site.

If a site is not easy to navigate or takes more than a few clicks to purchase, consumers could quickly lose interest.

“The site has to perform well,” Gorilla’s Mr. Grady said. “It doesn’t matter how well it’s designed or what features it has if it doesn’t work well.”

“The experience has to be well thought-out, especially in the luxury space where consumers expect it to work well,” he said.