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website & catalogue management

fashion



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There is an increasing need for brands to respond in more depth to their customers' desires and alter the way that they present their products, to further match how consumers experience and purchase their goods.

Glossy catalogues with page after page of models posing aimlessly and staring out with sultry eyes no longer capture the imagination of the public. Bland websites with miniscule thumbnails and limited

information aren't convincing enough to lead consumers to part with their hard-earned brass, let alone display any brand loyalty.

People who shop for designer clothes and accessories have a range of reasons and motives – the quality of the product and experience, the satisfaction of joining an elite club or subculture, pure aspiration... and many more. In fact some brands are created out of the tastes of a particular demographic, specifically answering their

calls for a particular style, like Pretty Green, the clothing label created by former Oasis front man Liam Gallagher.

So, buying a Lacoste polo shirt, Burberry coat or even just a Gio-Goi emblazoned t-shirt is an action that is loaded with connotation. Brands pick their models and advocates carefully, painstakingly creating the right image to project to their adoring public, but the more the target audience is fed, the hungrier it becomes.

Welcome to the club: communication directly from brand to consumer

The need for designer brands to keep in touch with their demographic is an obvious marketing task, yet one that becomes larger and more demanding each day. Consumers are looking for interaction, feedback, rewards and a narrative in each visual offering from their favourite label. Food for thought in a website, magazine or catalogue is what they're really looking for, inspiration that re-kindles their passion for fashion and fuels their love for a label. Shoppers are listening for the voice behind the name – if the relationship is one-sided they will walk away in their droves.

Giving catalogues a mind of their own: making the consumer 'subscribe' to a brand

Editorialising catalogues by the inclusion of features, news and interviews is one way brands can encourage a sense of community through readership and common interest, which circulates around their brand. It keeps the name front of mind, re-affirms loyalty and nurtures group identity. Brands demonstrating this particularly well include Ben Sherman and Fred Perry which tap into the demographic of customers using print media newsletters and microsites centering around anniversary editions and particular endorsements (Fred Perry '100 years'). Relating the brand to consumers' other

interests and tastes places the label at the heart of their lifestyle, and subtle product placement is likely to lead to additional purchases. The approach is more inventive than overt product plugs, traditional means of advertising or sponsorship.

The catalogue eventually takes on the role of a magazine in its own right, using creativity to create a highly valued product that becomes a free gift for loyal customers. High-end fashion has a following to rival any major sport. Dedicated fashionistas want new flashes, exclusive snippets, reports of new trends, opinions and discussion of issues relevant to the brand, so newsletters like the ones available at the Lacoste and Chloe websites are key to this.

One million front row seats: the web as a window on the catwalk

Clothes are what people wear, but fashion is their hobby. To tap into this, websites need to be up-to-date and represent the latest trends. Allowing consumers to interact and watch catwalk shows, see collections and backstage preparation, and consequently saving their wish list, keeps them smitten with the label.

It's also far easier: they haven't left a shop regretting not making a last purchase, because the shop is right inside their home and they can access their favourite items

at their leisure. Baskets, carts, wish lists, favourites and suggested items all help engender a feeling of inclusion.

The home page of fashion giant Burberry is focused around the launch of its Autumn/Winter 2010 collection, so you don't have to be an industry insider, photographer or model to know what is en vogue or need a front row seat to catch the big unveil. Prada displays a book of smaller images with a virtual magnifying glass provided, allowing browsers to scour editorial and images and make their selection, in the same way as a designer or critic might.

More than just a price tag

Customers of designer apparel are buying into the ethos of the brand, not just the garment that arrives at the end of the transaction process. They're interested in what the label stands for, what it promotes

and what other activities it's involved in. Lacoste has a microsite dedicated to its involvement in the 'save your logo scheme' which recruits other labels that use animal emblems with the aim of getting them involved in the conservation of the species and maintenance of its natural habitat.

It's a fantastic idea that stretches the luxury brand further and reveals its capacity to foster an additional charitable strand to its DNA. Now that users are able to make online price comparisons so readily, a brand has to work harder to offer something that is unique or adds value to justify its place.

Fashion vs. function: getting the basics right

It is noticeable how many of the major Italian fashion houses and luxury brands don't have shops or full catalogues online: Versace, Gucci, Chloe and Marc Jacobs all direct potential customers to online retailers or flagship stores. Prada's website is visually sleek and highly detailed, yet challenging to navigate. By contrast, Burberry's site has a simple layout, clear navigation and actively encourages users towards purchasing. The CP Company website is much the same. Armani employs a spin-off microsite for everything and Dior has kept it simple with product shots and a shopping area. The Paul Smith website is more than welcoming and eventually the Vivienne Westwood site directs would-be shoppers to the right area.

In the fashion retail arena, every aspect of communication is intended to drive consumers to spend their money on the latest products, and to encourage repeat purchases in the future.

PSP Rare specialises in synchronising tactical messaging and brand positioning across all forms of communication, whether it's a catalogue, magazine or mailshot; whether the delivery method is print or digital. PSP Rare is an expert in creating bespoke editorial content and ensuring that it is read by the right audience. Good communication knows no boundaries. To discover what PSP Rare can do for your brand, contact us:

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