

COLUMNS

Luxury Unfiltered: Connecting with ultraluxury clients

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By **Daniel Langer**

I have the pleasure and privilege to travel all over the world and support boards, leadership teams and sales teams of luxury brands on creating desirability for their brands.

Among the biggest challenges many organizations face is connecting with ultra-luxury clients and creating and maintaining loyalty.

For a recent project in Asia, the focus was understanding the mindset of UHNW Gen Zers, who either just acquired wealth through their own business ventures or who inherited significant wealth from their families. Insights about them differ diametrically from the ultra-wealthy of older generations.

At a recent luxury symposium at Pepperdine University in Los Angeles, I invited a group of UHNWI, including some billionaires, to share their insights and expectations. What I found striking was how critical for them the focus on hyper-personalized service and sustainability was - both a challenge for many of today's brands.

Ultra-luxury clients are individuals who, by all measures, exist at the pinnacle of wealth and influence, where exclusivity, highest level of service and status are paramount. However, they also often face significant challenges, from managing a complex portfolio of assets to understanding who their friends are really, and balancing privacy with public visibility.

To engage with these clients, brands need to go beyond offering great products and services; these are a given. Instead, they must deliver emotional connections, experiences and a profound sense of belonging. Each of them is different, and they expect to be treated individually.

The rules of engagement have changed, and those who fail to adapt will find themselves increasingly out of touch with this critical segment.

The end of transactional luxury

For decades, many brands believed that exceptional craftsmanship, quality materials and high price points were enough to appeal to ultra-luxury consumers. And, frankly, in many discussions I have still today, many brands repeat the same three words again and again when I probe as to what sets them apart.

As said, quality is a given at this level. What they look for is the emotional inspiration. It is about how you as a brand make them feel, the emotions you evoke. Ultra-luxury clients seek unique experiences and connections that reflect their identity and enhance their status in a meaningful way. They want stories, emotions and a close personal engagement with the brands they choose.

I recently reviewed several mystery shopping results across industries, and one aspect is striking.

In many cases, clients were disappointed about the service delivery, despite that the people involved - VIC ambassadors - are well-groomed, smile, are friendly and proactive. Given traditional mystery shopping KPIs, they would perform exceptional at every checkpoint. But clients were not satisfied.

This underlines that, similar to quality, friendliness and smiles are given - they are simply expected.

From exclusivity to intimacy

Exclusivity remains a critical aspect of luxury, but for ultra-luxury clients, the definition of exclusivity has shifted. It's no longer enough to simply limit access to products.

At a level where people can buy anything, brands must cultivate an intimate, tailored relationship with their clients. This means knowing them intimately, beyond their preferences. This includes their aspirations, values and desires. Brands must become curators of bespoke experiences that are meaningful and deeply personal.

In a world where luxury clients are increasingly global and diverse, it's crucial to invest in understanding their cultural nuances. The most successful brands are those that adapt their storytelling and client engagement to resonate with different cultural contexts while maintaining the core values that define their luxury identity.

Cultural empathy, one of my favorite topics in my masterclasses, is not a luxury - it's a necessity to cater to the ultra-luxury clients.

The role of emotion and experience

Ultra-luxury clients are not immune to emotional triggers. Interviews with them show that they often crave them more than the average luxury client.

Brands that create emotion at every touchpoint - whether through a unique, hyper-personalized, in-store experience (or at a location of the client's convenience), meaningful digital communication or an exclusive event that truly deserves the name - stand out.

As I have often said, emotion is luxury's most powerful currency. Experiences that evoke positive emotions become memories and memories build loyalty.

One of the keys to building emotional connections is storytelling. Brands need to communicate their core values in a way that feels authentic and resonates on a deep level.

However, stories are only relevant if they allow clients to see themselves as part of the narrative. Too many brands talk about themselves and forget that brand stories define the role of a brand in the life of a client. It's not about "us" (brand-centric view) but about "them" (client-centric view).

This is why luxury experiences must go beyond the ordinary. Hosting an event at a high-profile venue or delivering a one-off product is no longer sufficient.

Today's ultra-luxury clients are looking for transformative experiences that speak to their passions, whether it's art, philanthropy or extreme sports. These experiences achieve two things: they build an emotional connection and enhance the perceived value of the brand.

Creating belonging in a world of individualism

Ultra-luxury clients are increasingly seeking a sense of community and belonging. But when they do, they seek it in a highly curated way.

The feeling of being part of an elite and intimate circle is crucial. Brands have a huge opportunity in building communities that connect their ultra-luxury clients to like-minded individuals, creating spaces where they can exchange ideas, enjoy shared passions and feel understood.

These curated communities also offer another advantage: peer validation.

In ultra-luxury, the power of peer influence cannot be overstated. When clients see others within their elite group engaging with a brand, it solidifies the brand's status and relevance. Exclusive clubs, private dinners or even personalized digital experiences can provide these opportunities for connection, enhancing both loyalty and advocacy.

The urgency of a brand audit

Lastly, as I have discussed in recent columns, luxury brands must continuously audit their positioning to ensure they are delivering on these heightened expectations.

In turbulent times, brands that remain complacent risk becoming irrelevant. An audit will help assess whether your brand is truly aligned with the needs and desires of the ultra-luxury client, ensuring that you're not just part of their world, but are an integral part of their lifestyle.

This includes a rigorous examination of your storytelling, customer experience and cultural adaptability.

The ultra-luxury client is evolving, and brands that wish to maintain their relevance must evolve, too - at warp speed.

Simply selling exclusive products is no longer enough. Rather, luxury brands catering to the most discerning clients need to create emotional connections and curate transformative experiences. The goal is to inspire intimate relationships that stand the test of time. In a world of hyper-competition and shifting cultural dynamics, brands that master the art of connection will grow, while those that fail to adapt may die.

In the end, luxury is about making people feel extraordinary, and that is the true essence of luxury.

Mr. Langer conducts master class management training on various luxury topics around the world. As a luxury expert featured on Bloomberg TV, Financial Times, The New York Times, Forbes, The Economist and others, Mr. Langer holds an MBA and a Ph.D. in luxury management, and has received education from Harvard Business School. Follow him on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).