

Luxury Daily[®]

How do you take a luxury experience and digitize it?

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When the national lockdown was implemented in early 2020, we collectively stayed inside and went online. Daily morning commutes were replaced with the occasional drive-by birthday celebration, local hangouts pivoted to curbside pickup, and everything from board meetings to board games transitioned to some digital form.

While many industries were able to adapt and embrace the new digital frontier, for others, finding a substitution for in-person experiences was more difficult. In the luxury space -- apparel, accessories, vehicles, homes -- the shopping experience is often a reason people consider items at a higher price point: the smell of the showroom, the texture of the materials, the quality of craftsmanship, the elevated level of service. But in addition to these physical attributes, there is also the emotional dimension - how this product, this service, this place makes you *feel*. When the showroom is closed, how do you convey all of this through a screen?

Bringing these elements to life online takes a lot more than pretty pictures and clever copy. New technologies -- such as augmented reality, virtual tours, and sophisticated interactive media -- are necessary to ensure that the web experience is as elevated as the product itself. One Spruce Peak, a 27-unit slopeside property currently under construction in Stowe, VT, used a combination of 3D renderings, video footage, and a live site feed to walk digital visitors not only through the various available floorplans, but enable them to experience the vibrant surrounding community as well. Every element -- from interactive maps, to downloadable brochures, to building schematics -- was thoughtfully and strategically placed to anticipate buyers' questions, and facilitate the unique customer journey, whether they want to start from where a unit sits within the building, or zero in on the building materials and design elements in the master bed and bath. The result? A luxury real estate product that sold-out during a pandemic, not only sight unseen, but before construction even began.

Another aspect of luxury is convenience: the ability to achieve the desired result as quickly and easily as possible. Travelers used to the convenience of resort staff who can assist with dining reservations, arranging excursions, or securing event tickets are more likely to appreciate -- and expect -- a digital version of these same services. Maine's Cliff House resort has compiled their entire catalog of "Things To Do" into an easy to use, interactive digital display. Guests are able to engage with a visually compelling overview of on-property activities and services, learn more, and book their experience in just a few clicks, and from whichever device they are using.

Though many of these innovations were born out of necessity during an global pandemic that demanded physical distancing and discouraged the use of shared physical objects such as menus, compendiums, and catalogs, many have been so successful that they will not only live on in the luxury sector, but continue to evolve. A detailed, and highly personalized customer journey, delivered to the device of choice, and experienced from the comfort of one's own home is something that more and more companies will strive to deliver in unique and elevated ways, and something the luxury consumer has already become accustomed to.

The hospitality industry will need to stay up-to-date with digital technologies that their target audience are adapting to in other platforms in order to remain competitive. For some, this will require a major investment in updating not only their websites and digital offerings, but upgrading hardware to allow for keyless room entry, touchless menus, and virtual booking systems. The brands that do this well will inspire loyalty not only in their existing client base, but in the next generation of technophiles, too.

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