

Billfold Branding

Strategies for attracting affluent
male consumers

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As consumer confidence continues to wane and the R-word is bandied about in the press, retail brands are feeling the pinch.

In particular, premium and luxury brands are struggling to maintain their footing. According to a recent *BusinessWeek* article, shares of the world's 13 biggest luxe stocks have dropped 29% since last June. One strategy to combat tightening purse-strings: reach out to men. In a recent survey of 1,300 luxury shoppers, men reported spending 64% more than women on "fashion" items, and Forrester Research reports that men are half as likely to return an item.

At MiresBall, we've worked with a number of premium brands that cater to male consumers, including Taylor Guitars (premium guitars), Shure (high-performance earphones), Gordon Rush (men's fashion) and Vulcan Motor Club (luxury cars). Although there's no steadfast formula for marketing successfully to men, our experience shows brands need to hit hard in several areas:

An equal emphasis on form & function

It's important to appeal to the emotional and pragmatic sensibilities of all consumers, but it's critical to emphasize both fronts when marketing to men. You need to tap both into their desire for style and design and their demand for utility and performance. From a creative standpoint, this is achieved by combining compelling visuals and messaging with detailed and highly supportable practical information. Put more simply, **seductive imagery and a powerful headline will grab a male consumer's attention, but you need to pay off the sizzle with real-world proof-points and product benefits.**

Although it's not exclusively a men's brand, Apple excels at achieving this coveted balance. Apple presents its products as works of art, and the company's high-level messaging is always bold and exciting—for example, the company touts its recently unveiled MacBook Air as "The world's thinnest notebook." But Apple is ultimately successful because it backs everything up with design and technical benefits. The Apple website offers a guided interactive tour of the MacBook Air highlighting everything from its unique display technology to its powerful built-in wireless capabilities, and a robust "Tech Specs" area delves into all the nitty-gritty details behind the notebook's "thinovation."

Take another example from a recent MiresBall project: the redesign of Shure's consumer packaging. To appeal to a discerning audience of audiophiles, we paired what we call "the legacy shot"—a powerful live performance image that highlights the company's deep professional roots—with detailed illustrations that communicate the benefits of its sound isolating technology. The packaging's up-market shelf presence captures eyeballs, but product benefits ultimately help rationalize the \$100 to \$500 purchase.

Painstaking attention to detail

Savvy brands emphasize all the details that make their products unique, from the tone, playability, woodgrain and finish of a Taylor Guitar to the sound isolation and audio range delivered by a pair of Shure earphones. This is especially important for male consumers, who tend to thrive on facts and

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features. Many men take pride in knowing the ins and outs of a product category and can speak at length to why their high-end purchase outclasses or outperforms the competition's. This trend is common in our own experience: A large segment of Taylor owners can list their guitar's exact specifications, and Vulcan Motor Club's members are almost fanatical about the individual cars in the company's fleet.

From fashion to watches, well-known brands are using details to sell to men. The Giorgio Armani website opens with a runway show of its men's line, and highly evocative copy drills into the finer-points of the collection: shoulders shaped with tiny rolled seams, stiffened collars and slightly tapered pants. Similarly, rolex.com shows the face of each watch at a strikingly large scale, and offers flash "tours" of key features and videos of important moments in the production process.

A flawless customer experience

Premium brands also need to deliver an impeccable customer experience at every touchpoint. To achieve this, the brand needs to be executed to the highest standards, and every customer interaction needs to deliver on the brand promise of luxury. In our own work, we put significant effort into optimizing all the little things that bring a brand to life, from the tone and cadence of copy to the visuality and flow of a website. All of these elements work together to underscore a brand's premium position. Consider the experience of opening a box of Gordon Rush shoes. The box is beautifully crafted with a silver-embossed logo, and the shoes are wrapped in thick lattice-patterned paper. The design details work together to say: "These shoes are valuable."

But the presentation of the brand is just the beginning. **Truly successful brands are in tune with their customers' needs and provide the information, tools and support they need at every step in the brand relationship. For men, this often means catering to their desire for speed and efficiency.** A number of big retailers are tapping into these priorities, especially on the Web. Brookes Brothers added a feature to its site that allows visitors to view complete outfits featured in recent advertising, and the Art of Shaving prominently features "the 4 elements of a perfect shave," complete with quick tips and product information.

A rich backstory

Successful brands benefit from a backstory—a succinct narrative that expresses the brand's heritage, unique attributes and vision. A well-crafted backstory gives a brand meaning and helps elevate the overall perception of the brand and its products. Simply put, if the brand stands for something compelling, it is more likely to make a connection with consumers. Take the Ferrari brand. Ferrari goes to great lengths to emphasize its heritage designing "track inspired" cars, from highlighting its strong link to Formula One racing (and resulting design innovations) to its highly anticipated Ferrari Challenge, an event where everyday owners compete on approved racetracks. Not surprisingly, brands with a strong innovation story are appealing to men. But like their female counterparts, men ultimately gravitate towards brands that tap into a way of thinking, a lifestyle and/or a vision of the future that aligns with their personal interests and values.

Beyond the content of the narrative, the pace and tone of a backstory—and in fact all messaging—can be optimized for male audiences. Men tend to have a direct communication style, so straightforward, culled-down messaging naturally appeals to them. In addition, the exercise of compressing your messaging down to the most powerful ideas generally produces better brand

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communications. Ferrari and Rolex have perfected the “art of succinct.” Both companies utilize short, clear bursts of copy and rely heavily on imagery and multimedia to tell their brand story. The takeaway: These brands are confident, know what they stand for and put effort into engaging their audience.

Every brand is unique and manifests itself differently, but one thing is clear: Men are an increasingly attractive demographic and worth your marketing attention. These fundamentals are a good start, but you’ll need to make a long-term commitment to men and their unique priorities to realize significant results. **No matter what strategies you try, remember that men respond to brands that are authentic and deliver on their promises. Ultimately, we all do.**