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How luxury retailers can borrow a page from Apple stores

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Apple store in New York

The power that Apple has in terms of building consumer loyalty through its store environment, customer service and focus on design makes it a force to be reckoned with in the luxury technology world, and could serve as a guiding light for other marketers.

Innovative technology, focus on design, attentive customer service and easy check-out are just a few of the tips that other marketers can learn from Apple's strategy. Indeed, innovation, beauty, image and forward-thinking ideas are what constitute a luxury brand.

"Apple provides a case study that many retailers could learn from," said Pam Danziger, president of [Unity Marketing](#) ^[2], Stephens, PA. "The Apple Store design aims to deliver a high-touch shopping experience that creates a bond with the customer.

"They become part of a special group that belongs to Apple because the customer feels they in some way 'own' the Apple brand," she said. "The store layout is revolutionary with its uncluttered displays that truly spotlight the different products on the floor."

Byte of an apple

Apple has cultivated a store environment for which it has become renowned.

The sleek, uncluttered stores allows the products to be highlighted. In addition, its multiple-story locations all have the same translucent staircase and open-air environment.



Inside of an Apple store

One thing that sets Apple apart from other marketers is that customers can test-drive products and attend workshops for troubleshooting and insider information.

“Apple employees are taught to allow customers to try the product first,” said Chris Ramey, president of [Affluent Insights](#)^[4], Miami. **“They are gauging the amount of help each guest requires as they engage with the products in the room.**

“Apple has the benefit of selling a luxury product that its own employees can own,” he said. **“The brand is at the apex of hipness, so there is a built-in desire that the employee need not sell – the employee’s passion is real.”**

Another page out of Apple’s book could be in the form of customer service. The Genius Bar acts as a concierge where consumers can interact with an expert on the brand and its products.



Genius Bar at the Apple store

In addition, Apple speeds up the check-out process through mobile transactions. Employees walk around the store and digitally sell products via iPod touches.

This allows staff to spend more time with the customer, in addition to quickly accessing information such as past purchase history and store inventory.

Other marketers including Nordstrom and Barneys New York have already tapped into mobile check-out using Apple devices.

"Apple stores have staff that is knowledgeable and well-trained," said Ron Kurtz, president of [American Affluence Research Center](#) ^[6], Atlanta. "They have enough staff that customers can usually get personal attention without long waits."

Apple is fruitful

Apple's three most-famous products – the iPod, the iPhone and the iPad – are part of what makes it a brand to be envied.

This focus on design has totally revolutionized the way that consumers see products, not only from Apple but from rival companies.

"A luxury brand should focus on introducing only products that are unique and different," said Al Ries, chairman of marketing consultancy [Ries & Ries](#) ^[7], Atlanta. "That is what builds brands and contributes to a quality perception."

"The iPod was the first high-capacity MP3 player, the iPhone was the first touchscreen smartphone and the iPad was the first tablet computer or portable computing device without a keyboard," he said. "These three products are mostly responsible for making Apple the most valuable company in the world."

"When Apple violated the principle of introducing new products that are unique and different – Apple TV, for example – the products did poorly."

Most importantly, Apple has cultivated a mass following of loyalists who buy the brand before they buy the products.

The company has succeeded in doing this by focusing its efforts on values including customer service and importance of design in addition to untouchable features such as the Genius Bar and unique products.

"Luxury brands can learn much from Apple, both as a retailer and as a product brand marketer," Unity Marketing's Ms. Danziger said. "The brand focuses on the needs, desires and aspirations of its customers."

"The brand gets up-close and personal with its customers every day and takes those insights back to headquarters, to the engineers and to the designers to create solutions that the customers want," she said. "Apple is driven by customer insights."

Final Take

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