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Why the sudden obsession with luxury footwear?

By [Rachel Lamb](#)

November 30, 2011



Harrods' shoe salon

The leading luxury department stores including Bloomingdale's, Bergdorf Goodman, Neiman Marcus and Harrods have been pushing their shoe departments, leading experts to wonder why footwear is becoming a new obsession in the industry.

Whether it is through social media, out-of-home ads, in-store promotions or Web site plugs, leaders have been using all means at their disposal to bring consumers in-store to check out the latest styles in footwear. Even mainstream department store Macy's is revamping its Herald Square store in New York to create a super-luxury shoe department.

"One thing I learned being in the shoe business is that it's an incredibly cyclical business," said Paula Rosenblum, managing partner at RSR, Miami. "For seemingly no reason, a brand or style will get hot as a pistol, and then it shifts elsewhere."

"So, it seems we've moved from \$200 tennis shoes, past "hiking boots" into the high-end luxury shoe phase," she said. "Do I think this trend has legs?"

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"The type of shoe category du jour is a fashion statement, and I expect this trend to last a few years and then shift elsewhere."

Trend has legs

Over the summer, London-based department store Harrods opened its first men's shoe salon and feted it with a celebrity-studded party.

The retailer both promoted the launch and showed pictures of the party on its Facebook page, connecting consumers to the shop and those who attended.

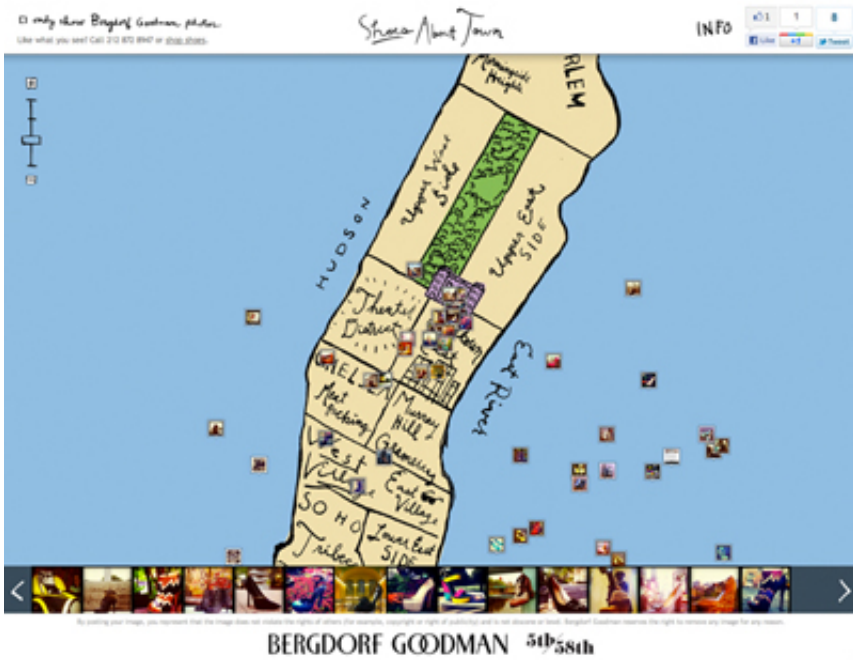


Harrods shoe salon

In addition, Harrods incorporated in-store advertisements and promoted the new salon on its first mobile application.

Meanwhile, New York-based department store Bergdorf Goodman dedicated an entire store, catalog and campaign to its new shoe department.

Bergdorf also launched its “shoe about town” mobile app, where a map acts as a bulletin board of New York on which the retailer and consumers can post photos of shoes in the various locales throughout the city.



Bergdorf's Shoe About Town map

Bergdorf's sibling Neiman Marcus paired with social shopping platform ThisNext.com last week to create Shoe Dish, the first Facebook application where consumers can share shoes with their friends and buy them on-site.

Also, department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is going a step further to promote its footwear department with a Tumblr account dedicated to its flagship shoe salon's 10022 ZIP code, using famed blogger Man Repeller as a model.



Saks' shoe Tumblr

Even Macy's is remodeling its Herald Square location in New York to build the world's largest shoe salon, according to the retailer.

“You know, it’s easier to knock off the outfit than it is to knock off the shoes,” Ms. Rosenblum said.

“This is an area where brand really matters,” she said. “It’s all about the cache of the brand.”

Well-heeled

With all of the competition, it can be hard for a retailer to stand out from rivals.

To differentiate, a retailer has to emphasize its own personality and stay true to its core values.

Marketing is also important. The more channels that a retailer uses, the more likely it is to reach a wider range of consumers.

For instance, younger consumers are more likely to connect with a brand via social media and mobile, while older shoppers are likely to tap mediums such as out of home, in-store and Web sites.

Another tactic, however, may be to highlight certain important brands to whom affluent shoppers can relate.

“In this case, it’s all about the shoe brands,” Ms. Rosenblum said. “A Jimmy Choo or Manolo Blahnik are not substitutable.

“That’s why Christian Louboutin is trying to call the red sole his intellectual property,” she said. “It defines the brand.”

Final Take

Kayla Hutzler, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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