THE : FUTURE : LABORATORY

THE : FUTURES : REPORT
: : LUXURY
: : 2015

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Revelation Brands

Serendipity is being strangled by the predictive power of digital mega-systems such as Amazon. Bricks-and-mortar browsing is all about the unexpected joy of a chance retail find hidden on a rail or shelf at the back of a store.

'When we browse in a shop or a magazine, we discover things,' says Douglas McCabe, CEO of media consultancy Enders Analysis. 'Online, the opposite is true.'

Research carried out by Censuswide found that 50% of visitors to bookshops often leave the store with an impulse purchase. By contrast, just 3% of book choices on Amazon are unplanned, according to Codex Group. Censuswide also found that 68% of people agree that bookshops are still the best places to discover books.

So innovative luxury names are becoming Revelation Brands, creating inspiring and intriguing journeys of discovery that aim to guide consumers toward products they didn't know they wanted.

Luxury fragrance brand Illuminum takes the unusual step of using sensory deprivation to surprise consumers at its Colour As A Narrative project in London. A room in a Georgian townhouse is transformed into a rough-walled grey cave by liberal applications of volcanic ash from Mount Vesuvius.

The featureless surroundings force visitors to focus on their sense of smell as they choose from 37 unlabelled glass vials of scent, prompted only by occasional questions about preferred ingredients from expert staff.

'You experience the scents through an intuitive sense of discovery rather than the prescriptive [guidance] we often experience in department stores,' says Asakala Geraghty, Illuminum's creative director.

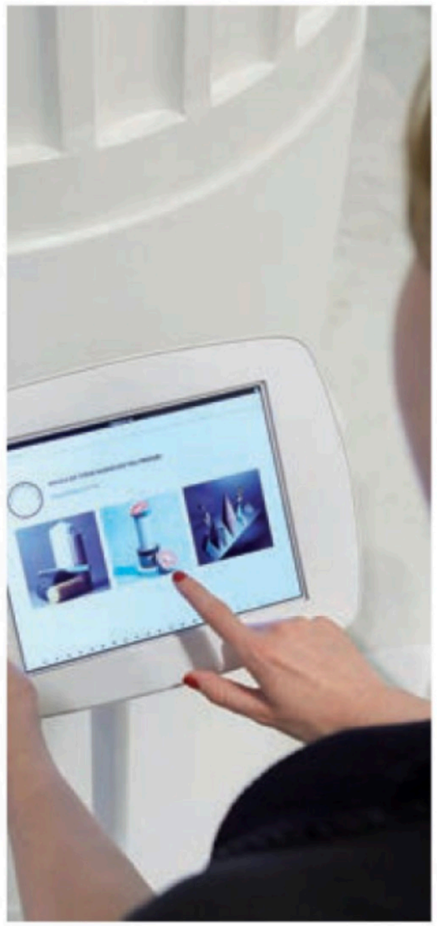
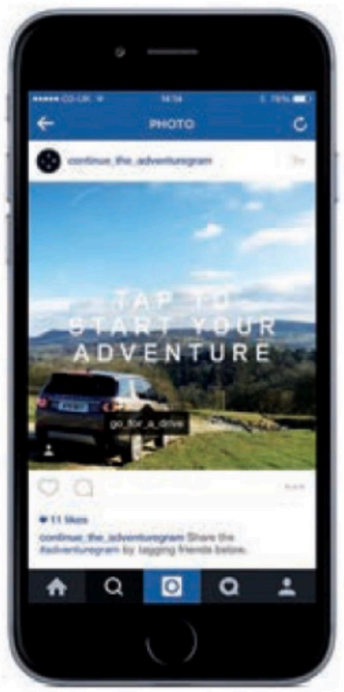
Another luxury fragrance brand highlighting the importance of discovery is Florida-based company Babalú. The 'casual luxury' brand created the Perfume Genie, a quiz-cum-digital display, in its Miami store.

Customers walk through the interactive experience and answer a series of questions, which helps them find the most appropriate scent from Babalú's choice of thousands.

In another revelation strategy, Land Rover launched its new Discovery Sport with a social-media campaign that used more than 140 Instagram accounts to allow consumers to create their unique 'choose your own adventure' story.

What this means to your brand

: Online predictive technology is a fine tool for making those uninspiring everyday purchases such as groceries or a new pair of socks. But what consumers seek from luxury is revelation: a feeling that chance and instinct have led them to the joy of a rare and treasured item.

: Don't aim to be quick and efficient. Take your consumers on the road less travelled, on a meandering journey of discovery through their wants and desires to a surprising and serendipitous destination, rather the quickest route from A to B.

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