



WHITE PAPER

LUXURY AND
REMOTE CUSTOMER RELATIONS

THE POWER (AND MAGIC) OF BRAND AMBASSADORS

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PREFACE

Brand ambassadors: [noun] **Brand lovers. They have had experience of its products and/or services, and act as prescribers. They stand out for their commitment and authenticity.**

Like a country's ambassador, a brand ambassador promotes the identity, values and culture of a brand. Whether they are in-store sales assistants or remote advisors, they are true allies, willing to share their brand experience with enthusiasm and to pass on credible, authentic advice. In the world of luxury, if each continent is a sector, each brand is a country with its own environment, heritage, codes, language, rituals, products and services. And its own ambassadors!

Today, in the age of the omnichannel and social media, ambassadorship is more strategic than ever for luxury brands, because the brand experience is no longer linear. Customers have become volatile, flitting between websites, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, from a visit to a store to an interaction with a customer advisor on the phone... In an ongoing dialogue with the brand. The customer journey is becoming protean and fluid. This multiplication of communication channels can dilute the customer experience, when the notions of «seamlessness» and fluidity are essential in continuing to generate trust and preference.

The luxury 'experience chain' thus needs to be considered in its entirety. Every link in the chain is crucial in delivering the brand promise. This signature and this commitment are unique to the company and must be applied at all points of contact, whether physical or digital. To a certain extent, the product itself is just another vehicle for the experience. So the value of a brand is also its shared experience, its reputation and what people say about it. Confirmation of whether or not it keeps its promise.

To guarantee an experience that lives up to the brand promise, even from a distance, it's essential to be able to rely on genuine brand lovers imbued with the brand spirit, who have personal experience of it and can pass this on. We need people who can convey emotion and make people feel excited by describing a product or service. Magicians who transform distance into proximity, and can perpetuate dreams through words. In short, brand ambassadors. But who are they? What are the levers for getting them to commit? And what are the new forms of ambassadorship?

Through this white paper, BlueLink formalises decades of expertise in customer relations, and shares some of its secrets for cultivating unique and memorable experiences through the talent of its brand ambassadors.



1 BRAND AMBASSADORS IN THE MAKING: PORTRAIT

As we saw in the preface, if in the world of luxury each continent is a sector, then each brand is a country with its own identity, its own culture... and its own ambassadors! Taking the analogy a step further, ambassadors are always abroad, at a distance from their country. They represent it and their task is to promote its identity, spirit and values beyond its borders. The same applies to the remote brand ambassador. Dedicated to embodying the brand they represent, they are its fervent advocates. Guaranteeing the continuity of a personalised customer experience that is also fluid and on-point, in keeping with the brand image. It involves a skilful alchemy that can be achieved by identifying the right talent. So, sourcing future ambassadors is vitally important. Listening skills, a service-oriented mindset, elegance, discretion and excellent diction are prerequisites. Fertile ground for the magic of an exceptional customer experience...

EXPERT'S VOICE

“Often, recruiters are looking for classic profiles who tick all the boxes. Mobility and atypical career paths are disparaged – wrongly, I think. I am firmly convinced that luxury is more powerful if it gives people the opportunity to be themselves, while respecting a specific framework, standards and codes. In my view, only real personalities know how to convey emotion, and that’s the very essence of luxury. At BlueLink, we are keen to recruit talents with excellent people skills. Beyond the CVs and schools attended, the human qualities, attitude and enthusiasm of the future brand ambassador are essential if the alchemy is to work. After all, it is precisely these interpersonal skills that customers are looking for and which are vital for all players in the luxury sector. If customers are to feel recognised for their uniqueness, it is crucial to go beyond the basic rules of good manners. It’s about showing empathy and consideration, avoiding biased interpretations and adapting to the other person. The desire to please and determination nothing to do with qualifications. One of the keys to a successful customer experience is to take a genuine interest in the customer, so as to create a unique and memorable relationship. Inspiring people’s fantasies from a distance is a real vocation. It’s an art. With my teams, this quest for talent is a daily business.”

Fadila Mirghani, Head of Recruitment and Talent Detection at BlueLink

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF A BRAND AMBASSADOR IN THE MAKING



Eloquence

The brand ambassador in the making has impeccable elocution. Eloquence is all about knowing how to communicate. The Latin etymology refers to *communicare* – which means «to share, to place or have in common, to have a connection, a relationship». In the 17th century, Jean de La Bruyère spoke of eloquence as «a gift of the soul, which makes us masters of the hearts and minds of others». Today, this art of speaking is about more than the quality of the arguments. Eloquence draws on a range of emotions expressed through verbal and paraverbal language. The voice, tone, posture and speech rhythm all convey a wide range of emotions, enabling the brand ambassador to touch their customers' hearts, despite the distance.

Elegance in relationships

Brand ambassadors in the making have a relational elegance. They have the art and manner of keeping the right distance from the person they are talking to; they intuit the situation. Sensitive to their environment, they know how to adapt their language register to the context of the interaction. They have the courtesy not to want to be right at all costs and to listen to the other person. This elegance is also found in their writing: the brand ambassador is concerned with a certain aesthetics of language and chooses each word with care. They can convey the brand's signature, image and values with accuracy and elegance.



Storytelling

The evolving brand ambassador is a storyteller who creates connections through narrative. They can convincingly describe a heritage, a legacy, a fabric, a flavour or a fragrance, and skilfully create a world. Storytelling must be holistic. The brand must first know what its story stands for and then rigorously disseminate that story throughout the customer journey, with no exceptions, to deliver a powerful emotional experience – which is why it's crucial to be able to rely on storytellers! By taking the soul of the brand as their starting point, by staging and telling its story (whose protagonists are the products or services), the ambassador will have the means to convey their passion for the brand sincerely, and stimulate a customer's fantasies.

Commitment

Brand ambassadors in the making are aware of the societal and environmental issues in the world around them. «Inclusivity», «sustainability» and «innovation» are some of the key concepts of our new paradigm. These emotionally charged themes are close to their heart and are a driving force. They exemplify a certain ethic of care: with the intention of taking care and devoting care to what they do. Committed and engaging, they will be able to represent the voice and convictions of the brand they embody. Benevolent, open-minded and free of preconceptions, they welcome the socio-cultural diversity of their customers.



Foreign language(s)

The evolving brand ambassador is fluent in the language(s) of their future customers. Whether written or spoken, this is a fundamental prerequisite for offering a personalised service, taking into account the cultural specificities of the other person. Promoting the brand image, offering quality support, interacting in a fluid, natural way and grasping the linguistic subtleties, distinctive features and cultural diversity of the customer. It is absolutely vital to be able to communicate effectively in order to deliver an exceptional experience and meet the expectations of increasingly demanding audiences.

“Did you know that there are five Valentine's Days in China? That the number «4» should be avoided because it brings bad luck, but that «8» is positive because it means «wealth»? Being late is seen as a lack of respect, or even an affront... Knowing Chinese culture and all its particularities is very useful to me in my day-to-day work as an ambassador for a high-end jewellery company. I know that Chinese customers are generally very sensitive to hospitality. When they feel welcome, they are more understanding when faced with unexpected events and more receptive to what I have to say. They are looking to spend money on memorable moments. «The devil is in the detail»: this proverb is very true for Chinese customers! A little thing that seems really unimportant can be the reason for a purchase to be abandoned. The 'word of mouth' effect is powerful in Chinese culture, and this can have unfortunate consequences for a brand's reputation!

Another subtlety, for example, is that customers in northern China attach a great deal of importance to the prestige of a brand, whereas in the south, they are more sensitive to value for money.

Hyper-connected, curious, romantic, extravagant, in a hurry, demanding, detail-oriented and pragmatic are just some of the characteristics of Chinese customers. With one cardinal value: the family. As well as the language, there are many specific aspects of Chinese culture you really need to master if you want to be convincing and trustworthy.”

Bao, BlueLink ambassador serving a high-end jewellery company

2 BRAND AMBASSADORS IN ACTION: LEVERS OF COMMITMENT



Inspiring dreams; embodying a soul; passing on a story, a heritage, convictions; conveying an emotion or a sensation; keeping a promise... These are just some of the brand ambassador's many powers. To produce this magic from a distance, it takes talent! It's an art. The art of creating a connection. Initially highly technical, jobs in customer relations have been transformed, underpinned by digitisation and the development of communication tools. The human aspect has become essential. When it comes to sourcing talent, the focus is on human qualities like relational intelligence, interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate. To develop the potential of these ambassadors, training is a highly important aspect, but not the only one. Because to increase the sense of belonging and commitment, we need to make the ambassador experience a prerequisite for the customer experience.

Realising that we are a vital link in the chain that makes up a customer's experience was decisive in my understanding of the job. Personally, I really understood it by experiencing it: an immersion of several days in the shop, in physical contact with my customers, with support by sales colleagues with whom I spent time every day at a distance.

These are very intense days, because although we all represent the same company, assisting customers in the store offers a new perspective. I'm helped by the materials, the colours, the fragrances and the atmosphere created by the layout. The remarkable items surrounding me illustrate what I say: that's usually the only convincing message!

But that's not the only advantage that struck me during these immersion days: they greatly facilitate the relationship between shops and the customer relations team. I understood their space, their procedures and their obligations, and it was then easier for me to explain them to my customers.

I was much more confident in my descriptions because I'd been able to touch the leather of a shoe, and study the fall of a dress, the pleat of a shirt or the staying power of a perfume... everything is simpler and clearer when you've experienced it for yourself.

Margherita, BlueLink ambassador serving an haute couture company

FOCUS ON THE KEY DRIVERS OF COMMITMENT

A culture of service excellence

In addition to the technical aspects, such as becoming familiar with the brand's tools, products and services, training must be consistent with the customer journey.

In the last few years, brands have moved from a rationale focused on production (designing a product or service, working on its supply chain and top-down communication so that at the end of the chain it reaches the end consumer) to one focused on the customer experience. This «customer culture» must be the cornerstone of the brand ambassador's life. It is fundamental and provides structure. Behavioural and social skills known as 'soft skills' (relational intelligence, communication skills, interpersonal skills, etc.) are fostered through role-playing exercises, and create firm roots in the day-to-day reality of being a brand ambassador. That said, there is no magic formula for enhancing an individual's behavioural faculties (hence the importance of sourcing). Service excellence can only be achieved by repeating and/or combining numerous continuous improvement initiatives in a constant and enthusiastic quest for the better.



Plunging into the heart of the brand universe

Immersion in the brand world makes it possible to appropriate its tangible and intangible heritage, and fosters its transmission. The experiential nature of raising awareness of the «brand territory» strengthens the emotional bond between the ambassador and the brand, and is a «moment of truth» that must be taken seriously. The story, the places, the characters, the symbols, the language components, the codes: a meeting with the brand as it is, as it presents itself, conducive to emotion. Sharing convictions, values and a vision to ignite a passion for the brand. The delicacy of a fabric, the enchantment of a fragrance, the aroma of a dish: these are all sensations that linger in the memory, like a sensory afterglow. To convey a feeling or experience with authenticity and credibility, it is crucial to have actually experienced it. The ambassador's level of involvement, commitment and embodiment will thus be proportional to the quality of their profound immersion in the brand's world.



Alignment of the planets

It is essential for the brand to nurture its relationship with its ambassadors on a daily basis. Through example, it inspires the attitude and posture to adopt in the relationship with its customers. This conviction, the "Symétrie des Attentions" ("Symmetry of Attention"), a registered trademark of the Académie du Service, is based on the premise that the quality of the relationship between a company and its customers is proportional to the quality of the relationship between that company and all its employees.

The quality of the experience depends on customers' perception at each point of interaction with the brand before, during and after a purchase (website, point of sale, customer service, social media, etc.). And if we consider that this quality is the result of the skill, expertise and commitment of our staff-ambassadors, it's easy to see how important it is to take care of them and pamper them like real customers. A virtuous model in which each person feels recognised and valued for their singular qualities.



From a distance, human relationships are often built through the voice! That's why our BlueLink Academy offers modules focusing on the essentials of remote customer relationship management: mental preparation before taking a call, breathing, voice positioning, diction, appropriate vocabulary, mindfulness, etc. In the same vein, being able to listen, daring to make suggestions, observing, asking questions, paying constant, sustained attention and personalising proposals to suit the other person are all remote customer relationship management skills that we try to cultivate in our ambassadors over the long term. With us, training is an integral part of the ambassador's career path, underpinning their know-how and interpersonal skills.

A culture of service is built on experience: conviction must inspire actions and words. A brand's aura, no matter how prestigious, is not enough to ensure its ambassadors' commitment for ever. The customer experience is often the focus, but the experience of our staff-ambassadors needs to be just as carefully thought through, so that they are recognised and given the opportunity to reveal themselves, and in turn become witnesses who pass on this commitment... The values promoted by the brands – high standards and excellence – must also be reflected in the working environment and be a shared reality. These challenges provide a chance to learn new approaches to management that foster the qualities of both coach and leader in a coherent, positive and exciting dynamic we endeavour to perpetuate through the BlueLink Academy!

Linda Ganassali, BlueLink Academy Manager

3 NEW FORMS OF BRAND AMBASSADORSHIP



With the emergence of a whole web-savvy generation, a new paradigm has emerged. This era of the experiential goes hand in hand with the conversational aspect and a desire for friendly sharing and support. So smooth social functioning needs to be central to the experience. For the major luxury brands, investing massively in the digitisation of online and offline journeys is not enough: the commitment of the people who "make" the brand is essential. The brand ambassador is no longer just a remote customer advisor or a shop assistant. Today, brand ambassadors can also be customers or influencers in the social media. The challenge for luxury brands now is to bring together and coordinate their ambassador communities.

EXPERT'S VOICE

At LAB Innovation, we've been noticing for some years now just how much the jobs linked to brand ambassadorship are evolving and diversifying. Personal shoppers, beauty advisors, community managers, meta ambassadors and so on. With the boom in e-commerce and the digitisation of the customer journey, they are specialising in order to adapt to specific environments. For brands, these communities of ambassadors represent a powerful lever for self-care and feedback. The customer experience is greatly enhanced by fostering a loyal and cohesive online community. It makes a major contribution to controlling e-reputation and brand preference. These experiences are essential for developing a higher level of commitment among customers (who need to feel they share strong values with the brand), and offer the opportunity to gain new ambassadors: when a moment is spent together and then shared, or a craze is stirred up, new relays emerge... In the chain of experiences offered by the major players in luxury, each ambassador represents a decisive, complementary link. The digital and physical worlds need to complement each other, in order to offer a "phygital" experience that truly inspires customers at every point of contact with them.

Mélanie Noireaut, Innovation LAB Manager at BlueLink

HERE ARE SOME OF THE NEW FORMS OF AMBASSADORSHIP

Influencers via Live Shopping

Live shopping first arose in Asia. It consists of creating online shopping sessions on specific themes to promote certain products in an immersive and interactive way. These livestreams take place on the brand's website or on social platforms like Instagram. This online experience gives customers a chance to interact directly with the brand and, ultimately, to buy its products, often with the support of influencers able to guide purchasing decisions.



Personal shoppers via collaborative online shopping

Although it is now easy to shop online, something was missing: the notion of sharing experiences. With collaborative shopping, people can now ask their friends to join a private online group on the brand's e-commerce site. Each item added to their wishlist is automatically shared with the group, who can then comment and interact. Thanks to these community chatrooms, it is now possible to shop together and get advice from a personal shopper who coordinates the shopping session and fully plays his role of ambassador.

Augmented sales staff in shops thanks to clienteling

Clienteling consists of making all the customer data collected available to sales advisors so that they can offer an exceptional shopping experience. Equipped with a tablet, they become proactive. The tool gives them access to their customers' history, allows them to create a list of VIP customers to contact, and also suggests reasons for contacting them (reminders of customers' birthdays, the arrival of a new collection, etc.). Data collection therefore plays a crucial role, as it makes it possible to gain a detailed understanding of the customer and, through the salesperson/ambassador, to convey the image of a brand that is attentive and close to the customer.

Customer ambassadors as content creators

Although promoting a product via an influencer can be effective and appropriate, brands can face a "crisis of confidence" from their community. However, when uninfluenced consumers test products and give their opinion, the authenticity of their testimony is reassuring. This strategy of promotion by consumers or "User Generated Content" (UGC) involves consumers regularly identifying the brand's products in their social media posts by testing or wearing them. And by in the end becoming an ambassador with a power of influence that is far from negligible.

A hand holding a glowing, futuristic object against a bokeh background. The hand is positioned at the top right, holding a small, glowing, multi-faceted object that resembles a stylized flame or a piece of technology. The background is a warm, orange-toned bokeh with out-of-focus light circles. A faint, light blue wireframe of a human figure is visible in the background, centered behind the text.

At a time when generative artificial intelligence is taking off at lightning speed, we need to consider the impact of this technology on remote customer relations. The colossal progress of these ultra-high-performance algorithms opens up exponential prospects, full of promise but also risk.

As it can be used to assist brand ambassadors in real time by providing relevant information and suggesting appropriate responses to customer concerns, generative AI could also understand and even predict the preferences and behaviours of audiences via different communication channels.

It would thus enable luxury brands to offer more targeted products than ever before, and to meet the specific expectations of each individual, thereby boosting satisfaction and loyalty in the long term. Nevertheless, the issue of data security will be paramount in an environment where a great deal of personal information circulates, but where human contact and the reliability of the answers provided are crucial and must be preserved.

Used as a tool to assist brand ambassadors remotely, generative AI should help to enrich their responses or structure them more effectively. By developing appropriate policies for responsible and ethical use, it will limit the risks and optimise its use, while adding unprecedented value.

For years now, digital has been constantly pushing back the boundaries of what is possible with ever more powerful and high-performance tools. After all, these are the tools and resources used by brand ambassadors every day to create exceptional connections. Beyond these digital tools, the more subtle ones linked to human qualities – soft skills – make a major contribution to the magic of the interaction.

This magic, also found in the luxury object with its essential spirit forged by skilled artisans, is brilliantly transposed in the store or advertising campaigns, and needs to be extended to the customer experience and relationship. Invested with these remarkable powers, the brand ambassador will always be able to transform distance into proximity and keep the magic alive. Behind a keyboard. Or on the phone.

BLuelink

Bluelink is an international group with expertise in customer relations. As a strategic partner, it offers brands tailor-made contact-centre solutions and supports them in their customer experience and digital transformation strategy. Thanks to its department of consultants and trainers, the group strives to develop the talents and expertise of customer relations teams by cultivating know-how and interpersonal skills.

BlueLink was created 31 years ago by Air France to manage its loyalty programme. In an entrepreneurial spirit, while staying true to its DNA of excellence, the group has extended its expertise to all areas of customer relations, serving other prestigious brands such as Printemps.com, Clarins, Devialet, American Express and the Louis Vuitton Foundation.

Active in every continent, BlueLink relies on its 2,000 enthusiastic and talented employees around the world to fulfil its mission statement of going beyond distances to create links between cultures.

www.bluelinkservices.com

