





When US retailer Nordstrom opened its doors in Metro Vancouver in mid September, the buzz it brought to luxury brands was electric. From upscale merchants to unique, hard to find brands, the region's growth in shopping wealth "fuelled by affluent tourists," made downtown Vancouver the place to shop. So how can brands get a piece of the retail pie? Let's look at who's shopping.

In 2013, the Canadian Tourism Commission reported \$84 billion in tourism revenue, most notably by increased visits by overseas travellers from China. Chinese tourist visits reached 353,000 in 2013 – a 22 percent increase over 2012. By the end of 2012, Chinese annual aggregate tourist expenditures in the country totaled \$485 million.

Chinese consumers are responsible for 27 percent of luxury goods sales, 80 percent of which are made outside of the mainland. While there have been some economic shifts, this important consumer base is not anticipated to change their behaviour drastically.

However, it is not just high-end luxury brands that are bringing dollars through the door. Many overseas Chinese travellers seek unique products or experiences they have seen or heard on social media – be it through Chinese celebrities, local brand ambassa-

dors, family, friends, peer reviews – they too want a piece of affluence.

Many Western brands looking to expand into China may not have the current resources to do so. But do you need to have a retail shop or online store in China? Not necessarily. If you are not ready to enter the Chinese market on the Mainland, you may stand a better chance at getting a piece of the Chinese market by bringing China to you - through social media.

The Canadian Tourism Commission certainly sees huge value in using Chinese social media – appointing Vancouver-raised supermodel Godfrey Gao as Canada's Ambassador for Asian markets didn't hurt either. Gao hosts CTCTV, an online biweekly show to promote Canada as a top destination for Chinese travellers. According to the Commission, each episode draws an average 1.2 million viewers – surely that contributes to a lot of interest in Canada's tourism industry.

A 2014 brand study by a retail research group compiled the top 300 western brands in China, citing a

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growing tide of affluent, global Chinese travelers presents a unique, and still largely untapped, opportunity for brands to connect with 'mission shoppers'. Armed with a list of goods to buy overseas, these 'mission shoppers' actually save money on luxury purchases, preferring to buy outside of China due to lack of confidence of a product's authenticity on the Mainland plus saving up to 40 per cent due to Chinese import taxes.

Still thinking about the Chinese market? Here are some key areas for you to consider:

Your Brand is Being Talked About in



China (whether you like it or not)

Even if your brand is not in China, there is a good chance your product or brand is already being talked about in China. Many Chinese may have already been exposed to your brand through overseas travel, from friends, family, through knockoffs of your products online, even from daigou (when Chinese buy your products overseas and resell them in China). The Chinese are not afraid to share their experiences especially online, the good and the bad.

Chinese Social Media is Vast

To reach the Chinese consumer, your brand must be on Chinese social media. The key platforms are Weibo and WeChat but also consider other platforms that fit your target audience such as Dianping (a platform that ranks offline retail experiences), Meilishuo (allows brands to identify organic brand advocates), Nice (Instagram model that allows brands to identify grassroots consumers), and even Huaban (a Chinese Pinterest especially showcasing seasonal product collections).

Activate a Sound Chinese Social Media Strategy

From O2O (offline to online/online to offline), ensure that you have a sound social media strate-

gy in place to help drive brand awareness to brand purchase. Choosing the appropriate social media platform includes developing appropriate content including Chinese terminology, description, even visuals. Seek a KOL (Key Opinion Leader) or an informal brand ambassador to talk about your product or service. Build a community and get fans to follow/like your social media platform in return for special promotions. Whichever way your strategy goes, drive Chinese consumers to talk about your brand, ultimately getting them into your store and buying your product or service.

Optimize Mobile Marketing

Chinese consumers are huge mobile users and mobile shoppers. If your strategy is not optimized for mobile, the experience will create a negative impression. A mobile-friendly website including your location written in Simplified Chinese is critical as English is not commonly used. The goal is to make the shopping experience seamless, shareable and of course, profitable ■



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