

Luxury Experiences + Invisible Innovation

by Kayla Phillips | 2.20.19



Inscape Meditation Studio

Luxury is no longer defined by price, but rather by excellence in experience – as I discovered at Columbia Business School’s annual Retail & Luxury Goods Conference last week in New York City. This evolution is being led by advances within the luxury wellness, retail, and beauty sectors. Here are a few of the conference’s top takeaways and innovations:

‘Invisible Innovation’ in Retail

At [VentureFuel](#), we stress the importance of avoiding ‘innovation for innovation’s sake.’ Rather than starting with innovation, brands should begin with their customers’ ideal shopping experiences and reverse engineer what is possible from a tech perspective. This is especially important for luxury brands, where technology can feel inauthentic to their classic elegance. Here are a few luxury brands that are reimagining the shopping experience, with technology as an invisible partner to heighten their customer experiences:

- At [Tom Ford's beauty store](#) in London, makeup mirrors record customers' in-store makeup sessions with professional makeup artists, so that customers can recreate the looks on their own.
- The new [Gucci store on Wooster Street](#) in NYC is conducting a fascinating social experiment. Instead of hiring typical retail staff, they have hired people from all walks of life who love the Gucci brand and can speak to their unique personal connections to it. Currently, the staff includes an NYU professor, an artist, and a bartender. They assist consumers with the new Gucci DIY section with AR to help visualize the styles they create and with an assortment of unique lettering and a variety of fabric and color combinations on unisex luggage and the iconic Ace sneaker.
- [Neighborhood Goods](#) in Plano, TX has been described as the 'department store of the future.' They have curated a collection of brands to create unique in-store experiences and installations, thus merging the traditional department store shopping experience with that of visiting an art museum. The thinking behind its nontraditional pop-up marketplaces is to inspire communal, social, and human elements in retail.



Neighborhood Goods

Wellness as a Lifestyle

With [stress levels heightening](#) and more than [90% of Gen Z](#) reportedly stressed out, it is no surprise that wellness has become a [\\$4.2 trillion global industry](#). Brands can capitalize on this holistic wellness trend, just as Lululemon and Athletica have by hosting regular fitness classes in their NYC flagships. Here are 3 startups tapping into new areas of holistic wellness that brands could embrace and couple with their existing products to find new customers:

- [WTHN](#) is the 'Drybar of acupuncture,' offering a monthly subscription service that goes beyond the traditional acupuncture experience to include herbal remedies, cupping, sound therapy, and community.
- [Inscape](#) is a NYC-based meditation studio and store started by the founder of Intermix and inspired by Burning Man. Despite meditation being a mostly shut-eye activity, Inscape brings it

to life through sensory touchpoints like rotating art exhibitions, soundtracks, lighting effects, and herbal scents.

- The Well, which launches this spring in NYC, aims to become ‘your complete ecosystem for wellness’ through its membership-based club complete with restaurant, spa, meditation, programming, and more for a healthier lifestyle.

Consumer-centric Beauty

Personalized D2C companies continue to gain market share in the beauty industry by satisfying consumer demands and providing elevated customer experiences. Here are 3 new companies that could be tomorrow’s Glossier:

- [Prose](#) is a haircare startup that profiles an individual’s specific hair type and creates personalized shampoo and conditioner to meet his or her specific needs.
- [Hello Ava](#) is a platform that provides users with an AI-powered skincare consultant. A chatbot collects info about a user’s skincare concerns and analyzes a selfie of the user to recommend personalized skincare products that can be purchased directly through the platform.
- [Waft](#) takes personalized fragrance online. By choosing specific moods, scents, and moments through the online marketplace, users can create their own unique scents and design the bottles in which they’re packaged.

Amidst industry flux, Estee Lauder president Jane Hertzmark Hudis sees opportunity for future growth. She believes that the sharing economy associated with the rise of Uber and Rent the Runway can be applied to beauty in some way, and that whoever can crack that code will be solving a billion-dollar question for the industry. As these inputs shake up the beauty industry, they also reveal new consumer demands that level the playing field for startups and corporates to compete for market share.

The 3 major takeaways from the conference were that tomorrow’s leading companies will be hyper-focused on their consumers, holistic wellness will become the new norm, and innovation should be an authentic tool to heighten your brand story.

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