

Crossing the luxury-digital divide

Many of the best brands in the world struggle to make their websites and apps feel as luxurious as the rest of the customer experience.

This memo explains why, and exactly what to do about it.

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Introduction

We have some bold insights to share about luxury brands and the experiences they provide through their websites, apps, and other digital channels.

We begin by asking *what makes something a luxury in the first place?*

By starting here, we identify some counterintuitive conclusions with powerful implications. Implications which are not widely understood. Implications that can give those in the know a competitive edge.

Since the rules of the game for creating a luxury brand are fundamentally different from other market positions (in terms of product and service development, customer experience imperatives, and the psychological, operational, and financial rationales that underpin them), the way digital channels are integrated into the luxury experience presents a unique challenge.

Following established conventions may do more harm than good.

This leads us to the root of the problem: those with expertise in luxury leadership and marketing, and those with expertise in digital design and user experience, *do not see the world in the same way*. Hence our expression “the luxury-digital divide”.

This inherent clash of worldviews, assumptions, decision-making models, priorities, and objectives can explain so much.

It is why many digital experiences – even for well-established luxury brands – lack the luxury feel apparent through other channels. Why the introduction of new technologies often cheapens rather than elevates a customer’s experience. Why the websites of so many luxury brands are more “on-bland” than “on-brand” (often looking identical except for the logo). And why the digital components of most luxury brand experiences are so often the weakest links in the chain.

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With the problem illuminated, we combine theory, examples, and illustrations to show how to solve it: providing pragmatic guidelines that allow luxury brands to create digital experiences that achieve three things: a greater perception of value among customers, a stronger, more distinctive brand, and of course, commercial results.

What makes something a luxury in the first place?

Part of the challenge for decision-makers at luxury brands is that the concept of luxury itself is allowed to remain absurdly nebulous.

Ask a room full of luxury experts the fundamental question, *What makes something a luxury?* and a courageous few will blurt out some obvious keywords. But nobody we've asked to date has provided an actionable formula that allows people to operate from a shared understanding. And dictionary or economic definitions are of little use to the pragmatist.

The problem here is self-evident. It's all but impossible to have coherent, focused action if people are working under different assumptions, have different visions of success, are unclear what their customers want, or are chasing different expectations and associations for their brand.

Fortunately, we have a resolution. Our reflection and analysis shows that luxury brands all follow the same underlying formula:

$$\text{Luxury} = \text{Effortful} + \text{Exclusive} + \text{Extreme} + \text{Expensive}$$

Let's explore these in more detail, starting with effortfulness, the most misunderstood part of the luxury formula.

Luxury is effortful to provide

It has long been maintained that what customers want is *effortlessness*, regardless of who they are and the brand, product, or interaction in question. And there's a lot of truth to the claim.

Few people seek inconvenience, wish something took longer, or was harder work. Nor do they beg for things to be more error-prone or confusing. The idea that customers value effortlessness in most interactions is a solid hypothesis.

However, one thing can trump effortlessness in terms of the value we assign something, and is a definitive hallmark of luxury products: *how effortful it was to provide*.

We needn't delve into the psychology of why this is the case (though the world of costly signalling and related concepts is fascinating). We need only reflect on our lived experience.

Imagine giving a loved one a thoughtful gift. Perhaps you made it (or made the greeting card) yourself. Maybe you went to the extra effort of wrapping and presenting it beautifully. You might have carefully selected a time and a place to surprise them with it. Now, imagine you just handed them the cash equivalent. Which do you think will provoke the greatest appreciation? You don't need to answer that, it's obvious.

Consider a service experience where a brand representative – perhaps a member of an airline's cabin crew, a hotel concierge, or a customer service agent – went to extraordinary lengths to resolve a problem, or displayed unusual thoughtfulness, care, and attention. A moment when they listened and responded to your exact needs. Chances are you noticed and appreciated this

more than other interactions. Perhaps even more than the outcome itself. Why? Because we are hyper-attuned to the effortfulness involved from others, and have a visceral emotional response to these types of actions.

Why is it that luxury hotels and apartment buildings typically have a doorman or somebody who presses the button on your behalf to summon the lift? Is it because you cannot open a door? Is it because calling a lift is onerous? Are the buttons to choose your floor difficult to understand? Of course not. The conspicuous effortfulness on the part of the service provider is what *elevates the experience to the realm of luxury*.

Customers may never witness the hours of labour and detailed attention, or observe skilled artisans in action (indeed on occasion they may not exist), but it is their perception of the effort behind a product or experience which confers value on what they are buying.

It is this effort which communicates the reverence the brand has for the product, for the craft, and most of all, for the customer. It sends a signal that what the customer is experiencing was not easily, quickly, or cheaply made. That it required patience, persistence, pride, and precision.

This is why the best luxury brands celebrate the effort involved in creating their offerings. CMOs sometimes design entire marketing campaigns around it. Effortfulness is part of the story and drives the perception of the value. To feel luxury is to feel that someone went to extraordinary lengths to bring your product, service, or experience to life.

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Once you become aware of this concept you see it everywhere. Here are four ways that effortfulness typically manifests itself:

1. Craftsmanship

Craft is effortful. It takes years to master the skills alone. So when we see products that were crafted by an expert artisan, we are acutely aware that far more time, energy, ingenuity and concentration was involved than for a product born of automated mass production.

This effortfulness is what allows brands whose products and services are the result of expert craftsmanship to charge significant premiums over alternatives. Mark Ellison's book *How to Build Impossible Things* explores this intersection of craft and luxury fully, and is a wonderful, eye-opening read.¹

2. Fanatical attention to detail and quality control

A related but distinct concept to craft is the idea of fanatical attention to detail. Distinct because it can apply beyond the realm of traditional craft – to the design, materials, and manufacturing phases, as well as the stages of the experience which surround the product or service itself.

1 *How to Build Impossible Things: Lessons in Life and Carpentry* by Mark Ellison

Quite clearly, attending to the details requires far greater effort than ignoring them, or worse still, cutting corners. And customers often revel in these beautiful details, sharing these hidden delights with their friends.

A wonderful example is Leica's compact camera, the model Q, which has several surprising tactile details for owners to discover. The current model Leica Q3 costs \$6,735. Fuji's equivalent, the nearest competitor, costs under a third of that.²

3. Fully bespoke products or services

Creating a one-of-one product to a customer's unique requirements is necessarily an effortful undertaking – far more so than a standard or customised offering.

A Savile Row suit, for example, involves at least 50 hours of labour, two to three fittings, and over 25 unique measurements. Each suit is handmade to match the exact posture, build, and taste of its wearer.

Singer, who build one-of-one vehicles based on the Porsche 911 platform (whose prices can reach \$3m per car) have their brand motto “EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT” blazoned on the workshop wall in giant letters. A fitting reminder that underneath it all, what makes a Singer a Singer is the effort involved in making it, specifically sweating over the smallest details.³

4. Resource- or labour-intensive means of production

Means of production or service that are inefficient, resource- or labour-intensive are obviously more effortful to provide. As luxury increases, the ratio of staff to guests within hospitality tends to change dramatically, for example.

As already noted, using people where machines or the customer themselves might do the job is conspicuously effortful. So are the resource-intensive manufacturing and finishing techniques required in haute horology.

Every A. Lange & Söhne watch is assembled, then disassembled, then assembled again, followed by a testing procedure that lasts several weeks. Yes, a Casio tells the time just as well. Yet the closest thing Lange makes to a digital watch, the *Zeitwerk*, costs \$67,000 more than a Casio, and customers happily pay it.⁴

Conspicuous effortfulness then, is a fundamental characteristic of a luxury experience. So you'd be forgiven if by this point in proceedings, you are starting to feel a creeping sense of unease. One conclusion should be immediately apparent.

Technology introduced to make the service provision more *effortless for the brand*, in a way that is visible to the customer or guest, inherently cheapens the experience, undermines the luxury narrative, and risks compromising both pricing power and brand perception.

With all the hype and hoopla around AI at present, there is a greater risk than ever of luxury brands making this mistake. More on this later.

2 <https://leica-camera.com/en-US/photography/q>

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxdQVYZfU6U>

4 <https://www.alange-soehne.com/us-en/manufacture/art-of-watchmaking/twofold-assembly>

Luxury is exclusive

Luxury and exclusivity go hand in hand.

In fact, if there's a golden rule of luxury it's *always offer fewer than you could sell*. Here's how luxury brands typically approach this:

1. Restricting access regardless of wealth

Enzo Ferrari was famous for giving factory tours to celebrities, royalty, and titans of industry which concluded in the car park where a gleaming row of finished vehicles would be on display. The salivating victims would enquire which they could buy, only to be shown the door and told they couldn't have one – even when Ferrari were in dire financial straits.

The current management at Ferrari have taken the ball and run with it. Though they never disclose the specific criteria of their VIP programme, to have a chance of buying the new F80 hypercar you'd almost certainly be required to own all of the current line up of vehicles; probably one of each of their previous flagship hypercars too – the 288GTO, F40, F50, Enzo and LaFerrari. And, likely, you'd have to promise Mum you won't flip the car for a profit should Ferrari be generous enough to accept your \$3,100,000 payment.⁵

In similar fashion, if you present yourself at a Patek Philippe boutique and enquire about buying one of their most sought after models, they will likely scoff at such a ridiculous idea, suggesting that you buy A, B, and C models first, then X, Y, and Z. Once you've shown your commitment to the brand, they might think about it.

After all, if you can merely buy something with money, anyone with money can buy it.

What kind of exclusivity is that? Money alone will not get you an F80 any more than it will get you into San Vicente Bungalows. The kind of exclusivity that ultra-luxury brands aspire to has far more to do with relevance than resources. And nothing makes people want something quite like being told they can't have it, especially if that's a novel concept for them.

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2. Inherent rarity

Some things are just in finite supply. There are only so many Fabergé eggs. Only two people alive have sold a real da Vinci painting (one is a client of Methodical). There are a limited number of properties on Eaton Square. And there are typically only one or two penthouse suites at any ultra-luxury hotel.

This rarity confers exclusivity on whatever the offering or opportunity is. Which – assuming the painting, necklace, property, or vehicle has the correct and desirable provenance – elevates it not just to the realm of luxury, but to the pinnacle.

5 See *The Road Rat* magazine, Edition 19 #1 *Hyper Ferraris: The Tipping Point* by Matt Master

3. Limited editions

For those brands who don't have the phenomenal bargaining power of Ferrari or Patek Philippe, and whose products or services are not inherently rare, the other option available is to limit supply artificially.

Should a product be highly desirable, artificial scarcity creates the exclusivity necessary to establish a luxury positioning, particularly if the brand is a new entrant. A limited edition flagship product can also give more cachet to other models or experiences within the portfolio.

Was it coincidence, for example, that Damien Hirst announced *For the Love of God* (the diamond-encrusted skull) had been sold for a whopping £50,000,000 (in cash) shortly before the date of an auction of his previous works? Surely not. It was also not entirely true. The work never sold and is sitting in a Hatton Garden safe.⁶

We needn't belabour this point. Luxury and exclusivity go hand in hand. But, and it's a big but, many luxury brands with growth ambitions chase short-term volume instead of long-term pricing power, especially online. And (as with the concept of effortfulness), digital and exclusivity are not natural bedfellows. A topic we'll expand upon shortly.

Luxury is extreme

Luxury products don't just meet basic functional requirements. They create extreme, superlative manifestations of the underlying proposition and can yield gloriously irrational, and wonderfully successful products and experiences. Here are four common categories of extremity:

1. Extreme sensory experiences

Our senses are the conduits that connect us to the outside world. What we taste, smell, hear, touch, and see is the interface any luxury brand must work with to create the experience, emotions, and reactions it intends.

As a consequence, extreme experiences often begin in the sensory realm. Whether it be the tactility of materials (texture, softness, warmth or cold), the smell (perhaps the most evocative of our senses), the sound (or silence), or the aesthetic qualities. And who could forget taste?

The world's elite restaurants are now more than fine dining opportunities, they have become playgrounds for multi-sensory experiences. Their fare does not just combine incredible, unexpected flavours served in breathtaking environments. The likes of *Disfrutar* are creating edible works of art.

Heston Blumenthal's restaurant *The Fat Duck*, once voted the best in the world, features bacon and egg ice cream, whiskey-flavored wine gums, and meals that must be eaten with headphones on.⁷

6 See <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/damien-hirst-skull-storage-2064567>

7 *The Big Fat Duck Cookbook* by Heston Blumenthal is a work of art itself that presents the recipes and history of some of his most fantastic creations.

2. Extreme physical properties

Given the sensory nature of experience, a classic form of extremism also corresponds to the physical properties of the offering. Being the biggest, smallest, heaviest, lightest, or strongest are all fertile ground for luxury brands to explore, yielding everything from vast superyachts to impossibly thin mechanical watches.

3. Extreme performance, quality or engineering

Examples of this third form of extremism – the domain of extreme performance, quality, or engineering – are not hard to come by. One can point to the glut of modern hypercars whose performance well exceeds what most mere mortals are capable of handling as obvious manifestations of this principle.

But extreme engineering isn't just limited to vehicles. Established & Sons collaborated with legendary F1 engineer John Barnard to create a six-metre-long table from ultra-light carbon fibre that at its edge is just two millimetres thick, yet will support the weight of an F1 car – a solution to a non-existent problem that is every bit as impressive, costly and over-engineered as a car that can punch you in the kidneys.⁸

4. Extreme locations or environments

From the depths of the ocean to the edge of space, luxury brands push boundaries, putting customers into extreme locations and environments that create indelible memories.

However, to be remembered, one doesn't need to break the bonds of gravity. The desolate beauty and extreme minimalism of Amangiri, the starlight headlining of a Rolls-Royce, and the picture-perfect paradise of The Brando Resort are just three of an infinite array of examples of how luxury brands thrive by creating or inhabiting extreme environments. Even when, in the case of Amangiri, these extreme environments have to be purchased as part of a land swap with the US Government.⁹

Finally, luxury is expensive

It's basic unit economics. The most extreme and effortful offerings, produced in the most limited of quantities are going to be expensive. The sorts of economies of scale that mass manufacturers benefit from, or miniscule marginal costs that drive the profit of technology companies, simply don't exist.

Pricing also plays a signalling role, setting the customer's expectation about the position the brand occupies.

Get it right and the business can be enormously lucrative. As Bernard Arnault remarked, "*Luxury goods are the only area in which it is possible to make luxury margins.*"¹⁰ That's not to say that luxury buyers are not value conscious however. One doesn't generate colossal wealth by frittering cash

⁸ <https://establishedandsons.com/products/surface-table>

⁹ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/first-look-utahs-secluded-amangiri-691779/>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bG4C5mQnWTo>

away on depreciating baubles or overpriced junk. The truth is many luxury goods are an asset class in themselves, and the juice is more than worth the squeeze for the kinds of experiences that money can only just about buy.

Bringing the elements together

Having looked at each element of the luxury formula in isolation, let's see how they come together with examples from three diverse categories: watchmaking, custom motorcycles, and hospitality. As you'll see, the underlying formula applies regardless of the product or service.

Richard Mille

Even in the extreme world of fine watchmaking, Richard Mille's creations push the boundaries. Combining the most exotic materials (an entire caseback made from sapphire crystal for example), complicated movements made up of miniscule components (hand-assembled by the world's foremost experts), and extreme, distinctive aesthetics, their watches are typically produced as strictly limited editions at correspondingly high prices.

For example their collaboration with Ferrari, the RM UP-01, was limited to 150 units, priced at \$1,888,000 (each), and sold out instantly.¹¹ That the brand was formed this century – Audemars Piguet was founded in 1875 by contrast – is an incredible achievement.

Retrospectively, one might argue that the best way to enter a luxury market is the inverse of Clayton Christensen's theory of disruption. To overcome the lack of brand awareness that many established luxury brands have, one must create the most extreme product that is financially viable. A strategy pursued not just by Richard Mille, but the Paganis and Amans of the world too.

Max Hazan

In a nondescript industrial building in downtown Los Angeles is the one-man workshop of Max Hazan, who builds some of the world's most extreme custom motorcycles.

You might assume he merely assembles the motorcycles, but this is not the case. He builds the majority of components from scratch: milling, turning, welding, and shaping the raw materials to bring his creations to life. This is a highly effortful undertaking, and Max does not count the hours involved. At most he can produce two bikes a year.

The results are so extreme, they are more works of art than conveniences. While technically rideable, one look makes it clear that they are primarily forms of automotive sculpture. When was the last time you saw a glass oil tank, or a supercharged engine in a frame with no suspension and a wooden seat?¹²

Effortful, exclusive, extreme, and expensive.

¹¹ <https://www.richardmille.com/collections/rm-up-01-manual-winding-ultraflat-ferrari>

¹² <https://www.hazanmotorworks.com/rooms>

Jumeirah Burj Al Arab

Let's review just some of the extraordinary facts about the world's "*only 7-star hotel*" - a literal manifestation of extremism and effortful service.¹³

It occupies its own man-made island. People pay a premium to stay in *other* hotels that have a view of the hotel's iconic architecture. There is an 8:1 ratio of staff per guest. There are 24,000 square metres of the marble Michelangelo used to carve his statue of David. There are six full-time florists. There is a menu of seventeen pillows to choose from. Every duvet is made from down harvested from abandoned eider duck nests in Iceland, of which only 2,000kg can be exported each year. There is a suite with its own full-size snooker table, a trifling detail that barely warrants a mention on the website, perhaps to leave more space to showcase the on-site turtle hospital.¹⁴

With just two hundred and two suites — some commanding up to \$24,000 a night - exclusivity is guaranteed. You can add 24-karat gold dust to your cappuccino and helicopter transfers to the rooftop if you'd like to get more extreme still.

As with every other example, we see the same formula.

Effortful. Exclusive. Extreme. Expensive.

¹³ <https://www.businessinsider.com/burj-al-arab-jumeirah-dubai-inside-the-7-star-luxury-hotel-2012-9>

¹⁴ <https://www.jumeirah.com/en/article/stories/dubai/uncover-the-story-of-burj-al-arab>

The luxury-digital divide

Now we've got a clear handle on what makes something a luxury, let's compare that luxury worldview with that of a typical pixel-worker. We'll consider five important facets of business activity from these opposing points of view:

- Attitudes to innovation
- The basis for decision-making
- Underlying financial models
- Means of personalisation
- Experiential success criteria

Attitudes to innovation

Luxury experts innovate on behalf of the customer.

Digital experts innovate in response to the customer.

Given the extreme nature of luxury products it is arguably impossible to research your way to a hit product. The broad contours of what customers might want or need are visible of course, but you must innovate *on behalf* of the customer. There is no other way. You need a singular and extreme vision. You need to take risks. You must dare greatly. You must show the customer what they never dreamt possible.

All of which are alien concepts to those tasked with designing digital products or services. Their notion of innovation is to respond to customer insights and testing feedback, or ruminating on the customer's "job to be done" in a workshop, plastering the wall with Post-it notes. All of which have their place when it comes to making sure a final service is fit for purpose or refining an existing offering, but cannot serve as the basis for creating a luxury product or service in the first place.

The basis for decision-making

Luxury experts are led by their taste and sense of the brand.

Digital experts are led by data.

If we are to innovate on behalf of the customer, what can we rely on to guide our decision-making? The answer is our taste, and sense of our own brand. We trust our own judgement. We know our business. We're willing to make the call.

This position is not unique to luxury brands of course. Pioneering innovators the world over make decisions this way, and leaders in each field are usually tastemakers imitated by others. Yet the concept of "taste" is seldom part of the discussion in digital. It's almost a heretical idea that such a thing exists. Instead the basis for decisions should be detached, objective analysis of data, regardless of the decision in question.

The following quote from Ken Kocienda's book, *Creative Selection: Inside Apple's Design Process During the Golden Age of Steve Jobs* illustrates the difference between these two approaches:

“A team at Google couldn’t decide between two blues, so they’re testing 41 shades between each blue to see which one performs better...At Apple, we never would have dreamed of doing that...when it came to choosing a color, we picked one. We used our good taste – and our knowledge of how to make software accessible to people with visual difficulties related to color perception – and we moved on.”¹⁵

One of these brands pulled off the miraculous feat of creating a luxury perception for consumer hardware, building extraordinary pricing power in the process. The other one is Google.

Underlying financial models

Luxury experts aspire to exclusivity, selling fewer units at higher prices.

Digital experts work on the basis of massive reach at marginal cost.

We’ve already gone into considerable detail about how luxury brands must cultivate and maintain exclusivity, and the ways and means they accomplish this. The digital ethos, however, is the complete opposite.

The whole brilliance of digital technologies is that once you’ve incurred the fixed cost of design and development, you can scale up to serve massive numbers of customers at low marginal cost. As a consequence, digital offerings are instinctively designed with efficiency and scale in mind – to lower the cost of service, and to reach as many people as possible. The opposite of what it takes to build a luxury brand perception.

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Means of personalisation

Luxury personalisation uses expert judgement to curate or tailor experiences.

Digital personalisation is mostly algorithmic.

There are many means of personalising an experience for a customer, but the perception by the customer of the effort involved varies substantially. At the lowest end in the digital world would be the customer specifying some basic preferences: *show me the temperature in Fahrenheit...and prices in US Dollars*. Notwithstanding the effort it took to build the solution, the personalisation here actually becomes a mild inconvenience for the customer, who is required to self-select their own preference.

Next would be something purely algorithmic: *other people who bought this also bought this...people who watched this movie also liked this one*. Yes, this is a technological marvel. But to the customer, it is straightforward, impersonal, and irritating when the suggestions are off-base.

The perception of effortfulness increases substantially when we add people into the mix. A subject matter expert might curate some general recommendations. A client services representative may listen carefully to an individual and suggest a product, itinerary or specification to meet their requirements.

¹⁵ *Creative Selection: Inside Apple’s Design Process During the Golden Age of Steve Jobs* by Ken Kocienda

For example, the general manager at the Michelin 3-star restaurant *Eleven Madison Park* famously overheard a table of guests saying that they'd tried every quintessentially American meal except the hotdog. Unbeknownst to the guests, he dashed out to a street vendor, bought the hot dogs and had them plated and served.¹⁶

Are these actions any more effortful than the digital experiences outlined before? Arguably they follow the same principle of responding to a customer stimulus, need, or request with an experience, product, or service designed specifically for the individual. However, the perception of effort applied is wildly over-indexed to the human touch.

We therefore return to the same underlying problem. A digital worldview doesn't take effortfulness (or the perception of effortfulness) into account. It becomes easy for the creators of websites and apps to boast that their user experience is now personalised – on account of some basic algorithmic recommendations – when the resulting functionality may add little value to the user, and even less to the brand.

Experiential success criteria

Luxury experiences must be effortful and extreme.

Digital design teams pursue ease and efficiency.

Today's digital workflow, the *user-centred design* process, is predicated on a simple assumption that “users” (not people, customers or guests) have goals or tasks that they want to complete in the most efficient manner possible.

Pedagogues like Alan Cooper speak of *Goal Directed Design*. Steve Krug's famous dictum for digital excellence was *Don't Make Me Think*.¹⁷ Robert Hoekman Jr spoke of *Designing the Obvious*.¹⁸

At first glance, there's little here that one might find objectionable. It all makes perfect sense. However, there are some challenges to bear in mind.

First, expert judgement is required when the desire for *effortlessness* on the part of the user must be integrated with the appearance of effortfulness on the part of the brand; and truly great interactions manifest an “experiential signature” unique to the brand.

Second, it is easy to lose sight of the emotive, experiential ends to which our technologies are a means. We can end up with product and service offerings that are too rational and too logical, at the expense of brilliance, memorability, and distinctiveness. As Rory Sutherland remarked, “*The human mind does not run on logic any more than a horse runs on petrol.*”¹⁹ Again, this is not a popular notion within the realm of the digital community.

¹⁶ <https://www.thetimes.com/culture/books/article/the-restaurateur-who-inspired-the-bear-with-a-hot-dog-xwkd5qqmf>

¹⁷ *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability* by Steve Krug

¹⁸ *Designing the Obvious: A Common Sense Approach to Web Application Design* by Robert Hoekman Jr.

¹⁹ *Alchemy: The Surprising Power of Ideas that Don't Make Sense* by Rory Sutherland

Third, as we will soon discover, this process lends itself to optimisation of current experiences and interactions - but, quite counterintuitively, optimisation should typically be our last resort, not our first, if we're to create an extreme experience.

There is one further complication.

Conducting primary research and user testing for ultra-luxury clientele is a tricky affair. One cannot offer someone who values their time at \$50,000 per hour an Amazon gift card for completing a survey.

Consequently, what agencies and consultancies often put forth in their proposals or visions for the future is total claptrap. To put it bluntly, their earnest thought leadership tends to be a poor person's idea of what a rich person wants, not the real thing.

One such example could be the design of a booking process for an ultra-luxury hotel. Who, a digital team might ask, will use this booking process? The implicit assumption is the guest.

To put it bluntly, their earnest thought leadership tends to be a poor person's idea of what a rich person wants, not the real thing.

But the likelihood of an ultra-high net worth individual browsing a hotel website, selecting their preferred room, choosing their pillows, room temperature, welcome drinks, making dinner reservations, adding experiences for themselves, their friends, and their families, and then tapping in their credit card details ranges from slim to absolutely not happening. There is a team of administrative staff calling sales teams directly, discussing preferences and plans and other mundane tasks on behalf of the travelling party.

What are we to make of this?

As we wrote in the introduction, this clash of worldviews, assumptions, decision-making models, priorities, and objectives explains a lot.

We believe this is why many digital experiences – even for well-established luxury brands – lack the luxury feel found in other areas, and why when luxury brands introduce new technologies they often do it in a way that is totally off-key.

An example from just last week: a few days prior to checking into a boutique resort for a staycation, the hotel emailed, urging contact if there were any queries. They offered a number to text – very convenient.

Well, they were duly texted to double check that the early check-in and free room upgrade would be honoured (perks of status with the parent company’s rewards programme), only to receive an irrelevant, automated response from a chatbot.

Rather than using the miracles of modern technology to gather intelligence about the customer, appreciate their relationship with (and value to) the brand, then use that data to elevate the experience, some halfwits – unaware of how central effortfulness is to a luxury experience – used it to create a memorably poor customer experience and undermine the brand position that a legion of interior designers, architects, marketers, managers and customer-facing staff had worked tirelessly to create. They offered a ‘solution’ that not only didn’t work, but was obviously done for *reasons of internal efficiency and effort reduction, rather than quality of service*. This is a cardinal sin within the realm of luxury. One must never, never, never, ever do this.

To the customer, it feels offensive. How can the same brand that obsesses over the weight of a door handle or the sheen of calf leather act so indifferently in the very space where most customers have their first interactions? This is a classic example of the luxury-digital divide in action.

Another example is the sea of sameness that luxury brands swim in, particularly when it comes to their websites and digital offerings. To illustrate the point, as a party piece when presenting live, we often show the homepage of a luxury brand on screen and ask the audience which brand it is.

The answer generally references the logo in the top left corner, but there’s a trick. It’s actually the masthead of one brand’s website and the body of another grafted together, and *nobody notices*. This is failing what marketers refer to as “the logo-swap test”.

We know exactly why this happens, because we fight this tendency every day.

Digital teams do not begin their work by immersing themselves in the world of the brand, nor are they typically willing to take a risk and innovate on behalf of the customer, even though it has never been easier to test the success of such initiatives.

How can the same brand that obsesses over the weight of a door handle or the sheen of calf leather act so indifferently in the very space where most customers have their first interactions?

Instead, their first port of call typically is to look at what the competition does, assume they must have tested it, decide which competitor's solution they like most, and copy it. It is straightforward laziness masquerading as "competitive benchmarking", and it is endemic to the industry.

Just think about it. All that time, money and effort that goes into building a brand, with the obvious intention of creating distinctive, recognisable assets, only for the people tasked with creating most prospective guests' *first ever interaction with the brand* - their website - to ride roughshod over all that hard work.

The question is what are we going to do about it? How do we cross the luxury-digital divide? How do we reconcile these opposing worldviews?

How to cross the luxury-digital divide

The solution is straightforward, once you understand the problem and opposing worldviews.

In a nutshell, we take the experiential elements of the underlying luxury formula: effortfulness, exclusivity, and extremism, then consciously apply them to our digital offerings.

We radiate effortfulness.

We telegraph exclusivity.

We showcase the extreme.

And we do these things in a way that is unique to our brand.

But how do we do that in practice? Let's get into specifics.

How to convey effortfulness through digital channels

If effort is a cornerstone of luxury, then digital must find ways to flaunt – not obscure – that effort. Unfortunately, many digital experiences have been designed without this need in mind, and the craftsmanship, consideration, and complexity behind luxury products vanish into generic structures and templated content.

To elevate luxury online, we must make the invisible visible. Content should carry the fingerprints of its creators. And interfaces should reflect the care with which the product or service is made.

To do this we offer four pragmatic guidelines:

1. Attend to the details
2. Craft and curate content with a human touch
3. Intentionally highlight the effort that goes into the product
4. Build digital tools that support human interaction

1. Attend to the details

Two of the most common ways that luxury brands convey effortfulness is through craftsmanship and fanatical attention to detail. Both should be applied to the design and build of digital experiences, whether a website, app, or other digital touchpoint.

Quality varies with digital offerings as much as it does any other kind. Slow load times, glitches and bugs, poorly written error messages, odd breakpoints, broken links, squiffy alignment, and other visual inconsistencies are all common rough edges. And that's before we get to the interaction design itself, which is seldom as intuitive as it should be.

What stops luxury brands from applying the same level of craft and attention to digital that they do to their products or showrooms? And how do we fix it?

Leaders must commit to flexing timelines or scope instead of quality.

Designers must have the discipline and diligence to sweat the often tedious details.

Managers must prioritise ruthlessly with a “less but better” mentality.

Design and development teams must work together as one towards the shared goal of digital excellence.

If you can accomplish those four things, you're in an elite selection set. Few are doing this today. But these are tangible actions which, when done and done well, can make a tremendous difference to the perception of quality.

What stops luxury brands from applying the same level of craft and attention to digital that they do to their products or showrooms?

2. Craft and curate content with a human touch

Let's use an example to illustrate the effect of effortfulness in content writing.

When [Hodinkee.com](https://www.hodinkee.com) opened their online shop for new and pre-owned luxury watches, they didn't use the generic manufacturer's blurb on their product detail pages. They wrote their own copy in four categories: *why we love it*, *the features*, *the backstory* and *about the brand*, all written by an obviously enthusiastic expert. This effortfulness and attention to detail does a lot to inspire trust - which matters when you're selling \$50,000+ watches on the internet.

This strategy paid off. At their peak Hodinkee sold \$100m of watches a year, before being acquired by Watches of Switzerland (whose website unfortunately carries over none of the same luxury feel).²⁰

Similar opportunities are abundant for luxury brands whatever their vertical. Most digital content - especially copy - feels impersonal, generic, and halfheartedly produced in a hurry without thought for how a tone of voice or point of view might set the brand apart. Alternatively, it is the sort of effusive, aspirational, and abstract marketing guff that brands seem to think is wonderful, even if their customers hate it.

Or it has been written, so very clearly, by AI.

3. Intentionally highlight the effort that goes into the product

At the time of writing, if you visit the homepage for Rolls-Royce Motor Cars the first thing you see isn't a car at all. It's a cinematic tribute to the artistry behind their work: *Inspiring Greatness, A series celebrating individual excellence and extraordinary craft*.

These videos showcase the incredible skill and knowledge of the craftspeople involved in creating the iconic Rolls-Royce cars, by featuring "*The voice of the maker*." Here are some examples of the descriptions that accompany these videos:

Discover how Rolls-Royce artisans use 107,000 intricate perforations to transform leather into an artistic tribute to the clouds over the Home of Rolls-Royce in Goodwood.

With techniques honed as a Rolls-Royce apprentice, this wood specialist crafts a parquet masterpiece for a singular coach-built offering.

*In celebration of the Lunar New Year, the "Year of the Dragon" fascia is meticulously hand-painted by a single Rolls-Royce lacquer specialist.*²¹

What do these vignettes accomplish? Do they speak to the 0-60mph times of the cars or the fuel tank capacity? No. They convey the effortfulness that goes into making their inherently extreme products.

²⁰ <https://www.hodinkee.com/articles/hodinkee-to-join-forces-with-watches-of-switzerland>

²¹ https://www.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/en_US/inspiring-greatness.html

4. Build digital tools that support human interaction

Believe it or not, there is such a thing as the Rolls-Royce of shelving, an accolade certainly belonging to Vitsœ, whose iconic systems designed by Dieter Rams grace the homes, workspaces, and showrooms of design savvy (and wealthy) clientele the world over.

Every Vitsœ installation is planned by a dedicated personal designer, who works with each client to create the best system for their space. While this can be done in store and over the phone, it is often done online, where technology is used to support and mediate interactions between the client and the planner, with their online portal allowing clients to access and download documents and track the progress of their orders.²²

*If shelving can be sold with
a personal touch, what's
everyone else's excuse?*

What's so fantastic about Vitsœ's approach is that their online presence is used to support and promote the more effortful human interactions, rather than aiming to replace them. This is the antithesis of most digital offerings whose sole ambition is efficiency, commonly at the expense of conveying effortfulness or building relationships.

If shelving can be sold with a personal touch, what's everyone else's excuse?

²² <https://www.vitsoe.com/us/606>

Maintaining exclusivity in digital environments

Exclusivity in digital feels paradoxical. After all, the internet is built for ease of access and massive reach. Luxury brands must navigate this environment carefully, ensuring that when their digital properties invite people into the world of the brand, they do so without diminishing a sense of exclusivity in the process.

Key principles:

1. Consider how special offers or discounts are presented
2. Use design and copy to suggest privilege, not promotion
3. Make unavailability a feature, not a flaw
4. Reflect customer status via the digital experience

1. Consider how special offers or discounts are presented

The idea that luxury ‘never goes on sale’ is incorrect.

Many luxury brands offer bundles, special offers, or periodic discounts. Perhaps to clear inventory at the end of a product’s lifecycle, or to stimulate off-season demand. The problem isn’t having a sale or offering a discount – it’s the manner in which it’s communicated.

Plastering a website’s homepage with high visibility discounts doesn’t do much to suggest exclusivity (or the fourth “E”, expensive). Nor does bombarding customers with sales emails, offering immediate discounts on a first order in exchange for an email address (a desperate quid pro quo), or any of the other online sales gimmicks that are popular further downmarket.

Instead, the volume, visibility, and nature of discounts or special offers must be considered with the brand and market positioning in mind. You cannot discount your way to greater pricing power and a luxury brand perception.

This is something Harrods understands. At the time of writing there are 1,777 products on sale on their website, but you wouldn’t know it. There is no glaring “SPECIAL OFFERS” button in the primary navigation. Instead, sale items are shown within their specific product category, making them both less visible *and* more relevant. They are also listed as “seasonal discounts” which suggests that such offers are not a permanent state of affairs.²³ Which brings us onto the second guideline.

2. Use design and copy to suggest privilege, not promotion

Our tone and choice of wording, the information we share and that which we don’t all work to create or undermine a sense of exclusivity. Does our language suggest promotion or does it suggest privilege? Does it seem like a rare invitation to something special, or a cash grab? Is there a difference in perception between “on sale”, “special offers”, “discounts”, or perhaps “seasonal discounts” per Harrods, or “exclusive offers” perhaps?

²³ <https://www.harrods.com/en-us/sale>

How much information do we want to give away? Do we share the list price or is it only on application? Do we only release product information once the total allocation is sold? These questions warrant careful consideration for brands that wish to cultivate an air of exclusivity.

Consider for example, how American Express presents its product tiers. There is a glut of product information for every card except one: The Centurion Card, or “Black Card” as it’s known – whose absence on their website speaks volumes. This product is not for you, and if it is, you already have it. There is little publicly available information, and none from Amex about the specific criteria to qualify for invitation.

*This product is not for you,
and if it is, you already
have it.*

3. Make unavailability a feature, not a flaw

Exclusivity implies rarity, scarcity and limited availability, something digital platforms can easily convey by presenting what is unavailable as prominently as what is available.

When booking a table through Nobu’s website, for example, you see which dates are fully booked. The “Unavailable” flag signals popularity, excessive demand, and limited supply. It radiates exclusivity.²⁴

Luxury retailers use the same technique for other kinds of products, leaving items that are already sold in the listings. The presence of the “SOLD” tag reinforces rarity, creates a sense of scarcity, and urgency to secure what stock is available. Retaining these products within a digital ecosystem builds desirability, the *you want it but can’t have it* mantra.

4. Reflect customer status via the digital experience

The look, feel, tone, features and functions of a website or app can all be varied to reflect the customer’s particular status or tier and confer a greater sense of exclusivity.

The Citibank app’s colour palette for Citigold customers, for example, is different to other tiers of customer – gold, obviously. Why not go further? I’ve wondered, for example, why the only difference in the AV systems between economy, business and first-class air travel is typically the size of the screen. Surely the look and feel could work harder to convey a more exclusive ambience and a greater level of personalisation? Scrapping the pre-movie ad-roll for business and first-class travellers would be a welcome change too.

The same opportunities apply where luxury brands offer loyalty or reward schemes. Why are the app’s basic features and look and feel the same regardless of whether I have a handful of points or am the brand’s most treasured customer? These sorts of details don’t just confer a sense of exclusivity on the digital experience – especially if the change is noticeable as you move from one tier to another – it also conveys thoughtfulness and attention to detail, reinforcing the concept of conspicuous effortfulness we met earlier.

²⁴ <https://noburestaurants.com/>

Bringing extreme to life

Extremity is one of the hardest luxury codes to translate digitally – because it’s rooted in the visceral. You can’t feel the weight of a watch or taste the amuse-bouche through a screen.

In this context, extremity becomes an editorial exercise. Tell the story of what makes your product or experience extraordinary. Show the close-up, not the overview. Share the obsession, not just the features.

Key principles:

1. Flawless fundamentals first
2. From middle ground to magic
3. Showcase your extremism
4. Let the content shine

1. Flawless fundamentals first

Put yourself in your customer’s shoes for a second, and imagine how it would feel, for example, to stay at a luxury hotel where there were plenty of extreme flourishes and details, but the basics were missing.

Maybe the room was noisy at night and you couldn’t sleep. Maybe you couldn’t figure out how the light switches work. Maybe the WiFi is too slow to FaceTime the kids back home. Maybe – true story by the way – you check into a \$15,000-a-night suite, discover that they’ve made the books you’ve written out of chocolate as a welcome gift, but the thermostat is broken and you can’t change the room temperature. In such situations the flourishes and the intentional extremism backfire. They are seen as self-indulgent trivialities that annoy rather than delight. Why is that?

Because regardless of the product or service, the bulk of the value for the majority of the customers comes from the fundamentals of the product or service. And true excellence doesn’t begin with doing things differently, it begins with doing the ordinary things extraordinarily well.

Think of Lewis Hamilton driving a car. He’s still looking where he’s going, steering, accelerating, braking, and changing gear. He’s just twenty thousand times better at it than you or I. Rafa Nadal serves and volleys. He has a backhand and forehand – just like every other tennis player. He’s just very, very good at those things.

...true excellence doesn't begin with doing things differently, it begins with doing the ordinary things extraordinarily well.

And yet, it is exactly these fundamentals that are the easiest to overlook. And where there are service failings, the vast majority of the time it was something basic that went wrong, not some zany detail.

Digital teams are often tasked with building new, feature-filled websites and apps. But if the end result doesn’t load quickly, if it’s not easy to use on a mobile device while walking on a crowded street, if the experience breaks at the most basic demands it’s all for nought.

Extreme luxury then, is built on a foundation of boring fundamentals that few have the self-discipline to truly master. Remember this. Psychologically, *bad is five times stronger than good*.²⁵ A single dissatisfying interaction has five times the impact of a single delightful detail. There is a logical order of priority then. First, do nothing at all below what the customer might consider adequate. Then get to work on the wow-factor.

Let's talk about how we might accomplish that.

2. From middle ground to magic

The very, very, very best interaction design tends to fall into one of two categories - at extreme opposites from one another. On one hand we have *invisibly efficient* and on the other we have *remarkably brilliant*.

You know what we mean by invisibly efficient. It just works. You hardly notice you're using it. In fact, you notice it only when it's broken, or you have to use an inferior alternative. Invisibly efficient is great because it's one less thing to think about. One less thing demanding your attention. One less thing sapping your brain power. One less thing that *feels like work*.

Remarkably brilliant is the other extreme. It captivates your attention, but in a good way. It delights you. It's novel or interesting. Playful and engaging. It might do something so unusual you can't quite figure out how it works. It is the way the glass doors part and warm glowing lights come on when you reach out your hand to the B&O Overture.

Invisibly efficient is great because it's one less thing to think about. One less thing demanding your attention. One less thing sapping your brain power. One less thing that feels like work.

Both of these things - invisibly efficient, and remarkably brilliant - have something in common: they both *feel like magic*. And feeling like magic is a very good thing for luxury brands. If effortfulness creates the feeling of "I can't believe you did that!" invisibly efficient and remarkably brilliant add "I can't figure out *how* you did that!"

Here's a simple example of both in action. One that you're probably using every day: FaceID on the iPhone. The first time you use FaceID it is remarkably brilliant. How does it work? How does it know it's *me*? How does it work in the dark and at all these funny angles? How, how, how? But it doesn't take long for it to become invisibly efficient. You pick up your phone, it's unlocked, you do whatever you picked it up to do. You notice it when it doesn't work because you're wearing a ski balaclava, scuba mask, or welding helmet. Now humour us for a second, and compare this to other security experiences. Enter your username and password. Now enter the six-digit code we texted you. Now select all the pictures of a llama to prove you're a human. On and on. These interactions are neither invisibly efficient nor remarkably brilliant. They're sitting in the middle ground, eating your energy and attention. They're definitely not luxury.

²⁵ *Bad Is Stronger than Good* by Roy F. Baumeister, Ellen Bratslavsky, Catrin Finkenauer and Kathleen D. Vohs, Review of General Psychology available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46608952_Bad_Is_Stronger_than_Good

And herein lies the problem with *optimisation* that we referred to earlier. Optimisation takes those interactions in the middle ground and makes them a bit better because that is the goal. Digital teams are not asking “How could we make this invisibly efficient?” or “Could this be remarkably brilliant?” They’re saying “How can I take what already exists, and make it a little better?” – rather than questioning the need for it in the first place, or how it might be entirely reimagined.

Of course there are some situations where there’s little we can do but make it as painless as possible. In which case, of course we want to optimise. But luxury brands are about extremism and effortfulness. And the effort to push interactions to the extremes of invisible efficiency or remarkable brilliance pays off.

3. Showcase your extremism

People cannot value what they don’t know exists, and cannot appreciate qualities that are hidden from view. In order for people to appreciate the extreme nature of your brand, products or services, we need to make it as real as we can for them.

People cannot value what they don’t know exists, and cannot appreciate qualities that are hidden from view.

This needs to be an explicitly stated goal when it comes to a website redesign. Ask: *In what ways are we extreme? What is a brand-appropriate way for us to showcase that?* We’ve already seen Rolls-Royce’s masterclass. But they are not alone in nailing this.

The video and photography on Aman’s website have a cinematic grandeur. Slow pans and moody stills showcase their extreme locations, architecture and properties, immersing the viewer in the atmosphere of the destination.

Richard Mille use macro photography of individual watch components and intricate descriptions to showcase their extreme engineering, complexity and obsession – turning each product page into a case study in excess. Singer Vehicle Design does *exactly the same thing*.

This may seem obvious, yet many luxury brands get it wrong. There’s a difference between a slow reveal or leaving margin for delight, and failing to mention or celebrate the very things your customers want from you.

4. Let the content shine

Imagine you’re driving. The cleaner the windscreen and the fewer visual distractions on the dashboard, the more easily you concentrate on the road ahead.

The same is true with websites and apps. The interface is like the windscreen and dashboard; the content is the road before you. You don’t want to be distracted by a cluttered, busy design with a jumble of visual elements and options competing for your attention, you want a clear path forward, and to be able to immerse yourself in the imagery, text or video.

Interfaces must be constructed with a clear visual hierarchy where the relative weight and prominence of elements are dictated by their relative importance. Navigation and wayfinding devices must be conventionally placed, obviously and unambiguously labelled, and restricted to the fewest number of options possible to provide full access to the breadth of functionality or content. Above all, the least interface possible is the aim of the game.

Above all, the least interface possible is the aim of the game.

Step forward Louis Vuitton, whose website is a masterclass in digital minimalism.²⁶ Squint at one of their product detail pages and what jumps out is the crisp, clean imagery – mostly detail shots for reasons that should now be obvious – and the add to cart button. The rest recedes into the background like an English butler: there when required, but never intruding.

The site design is sparse but deliberate. Low visual density, high contrast layouts, and restrained colour palettes allow the product and content to shine. It says: we don't need to shout. You're already listening.

²⁶ <https://us.louisvuitton.com/>

Concluding remarks

To begin, a brief recap.

All luxury brands combine effortfulness, exclusivity, and extremism to create products or services that are necessarily expensive.

The problem – the luxury-digital divide as we call it – is that those from a digital background are not aware of this underlying formula and do things that directly oppose it: implementing technology-driven solutions and experiences that do little to convey a sense of exclusivity or extremism, actively undermine a sense of effortfulness, and cheapen the brand.

It's not all bad of course. Some digital folk get it intuitively, but being intentional about these things – sticking to the formula – would be a step in the right direction.

But what of AI? It may seem remiss of us not to have addressed the elephant in the room. But to make explicit recommendations about how to use these technologies is to undermine one of our fundamental messages. Luxury brands are driven by confidence in their taste and a deep appreciation of their own brands.

Luxury brands are driven by confidence in their taste and a deep appreciation of their own brands.

We can also evaluate the potential of AI in the same way we can any other technology, opportunity or idea to improve the digital offering for a luxury brand – by beginning with some simple questions:

Will the impact be visible to the prospect or existing customer?

If not we needn't concern ourselves with matters of perception. If the impact will be visible, we do.

How might this affect the customer's perception of effortfulness?

If the effect is to diminish the perception of effortfulness, and the solution smells of having been done for reasons of internal ease and efficiency, this runs contrary to customer expectations about luxury brands – as our boutique resort chatbot example illustrates.

How might this affect the customer's sense of exclusivity?

As with effortfulness, if the effect is to make our brand, product or service seem less exclusive, it will not help our pricing power. Yes, luxury brands have versions of their offerings available at different price points. Yes, luxury brands also offer sales and discounts. But the manner in which these things are presented warrants careful consideration.

How might it affect the fundamentals of our product or service?

Flawless fundamentals are always the number one priority, especially for luxury brands where expectations are sky-high. Anything that improves the consistency or quality of the absolute basics of the offering is a no-brainer.

Does this complement or contradict our extreme nature?

Luxury brands create extreme products, services and experiences, so questioning whether an idea, technology or opportunity is in line with the extreme nature of the brand is a given. Many would also do well to evaluate their content marketing in light of the need to showcase extremism in a way that is fitting for the brand.

Does this help us create the magic of either invisible efficiency or remarkable brilliance?

Anyone can optimise. But moving to the magic zones at either end of the spectrum takes ingenuity, lateral thinking and a holistic view on how people, processes and technology can work together. Try making this outcome the goal though, before settling for cut and paste imitation or incremental improvements that few will ever notice.

Do these effects feel brand-appropriate?

The key to bridging the luxury-digital divide is to start with the brand. If what's being tabled isn't a good fit, or the execution doesn't convey your experiential signature, well, don't do it.

Does it cause us to converge with our rivals, or further distinguish ourselves?

You can't bore people into taking an interest in you. You can't stand out by being the same. And you can't get extraordinary results with ordinary ideas. Allowing digital teams to embark on a competitive benchmarking exercise, then to cherry pick whatever they like from the competition - instead of thinking deeply about the problem or opportunity - is taking the superhighway to mediocrity. Do not tolerate this sort of laziness, nor create the conditions where such an approach is encouraged, and be mindful of whether you are converging or distinguishing yourselves.

One can further interrogate any concept, idea or technology using any of the more detailed recommendations and guidelines we've explained, but these handful of questions alone are potent enough as a basic set of filters, and ought to dissuade many of the most egregious offences, while stimulating debate about the role technology and digital channels play within the confines of any luxury brand. All of which, it must be acknowledged, takes courage, conviction, and commitment.

Few, if any luxury brands can opt out of competing in the digital world, nor should they want to. Modern technologies offer opportunities that border on the miraculous, and myriad ways to enhance the customer's experience, distinguish the brand, and deliver commercial results.

That's why it pains us to see digital let the side down so often.

Brands famed for their quality and commitment to excellence continue to launch crappy apps that barely work and add no value, websites that aren't in the same league of polish as the physical products they represent, and useless chatbots that undermine the effortful, exclusive and extreme image of brands that took decades to build.

But if we can combine the best of these worlds: the ease of use, convenience, data-richness, and contextual awareness of digital channels, with the effortfulness, exclusivity, and extremism of the luxury world, the results will truly inspire and delight.

About the authors

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Matt is the CEO of Methodical and an internationally renowned business author and speaker.

He won the CMI's Management Book of the Year for his first book, *The Ten Principles Behind Great Customer Experiences*, considered by many to be the definitive book on the subject.

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He has been cited and interviewed by the world's leading research firms and as a speaker has addressed industry leaders at every kind of organisation imaginable from Microsoft to the FBI. He is no stranger to luxury brands, having been invited to consult and share ideas with leaders in luxury watches, hospitality, technology products, and cars.

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Previously he spent time with Etihad Airways, where he was responsible for the global brand, consumer marketing, and digital experience as Head of Global Marketing, and with Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism as Head of Global Campaigns, where he helped make Dubai the most visited city in the world.

His experience spans multiple countries, cultures, and diverse industries, including luxury hospitality, tourism, finance, aviation, and motorsports.

His work has been awarded by both leading creative and digital juries such as Cannes Lions, D&AD, The One Show, and The Effies.

Methodical is a digital design agency and customer experience consultancy.

What we offer is simple: we make it easier and more enjoyable for people to do business with our clients. On their websites, their apps and across any other touchpoints.

The results speak for themselves. Our clients have seen 100%+ increases in online revenue and conversion rates, significantly lowered customer service costs, and improved brand sentiment – often at the same time.

We accomplish these results because we deal in realities, leaving the hand-waving and hyperbole, the myths and magical thinking, the far-fetched and fantastical to others. We are pragmatic craftspeople with a job to do.

Our clients

Our clients are an enviable mix of titans such as Arm, Zoetis, and SVB; icons like Leica and Jumeirah; and pioneering innovators including Mimecast, Guardant, Fisher Wallace, and Artory.

They are dotted around the world – particularly North America, Europe and the Middle East – and served by our international team.

We do

- Customer and user research
- Requirements gathering
- UX/UI and visual design
- Prototyping and user testing
- Customer experience strategy
- Journey mapping
- Service design
- Training and workshops

Our philosophy

To us, a successful project achieves three things: commercial results, a stronger brand, and happier customers.

We also believe that true excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

With this in mind, we stubbornly focus on the fundamentals:

- An absolute commitment to maximising the value we provide.
- Exceptional communication and relationship management.
- Commercial pragmatism.
- Deep immersion in the problem space.
- A willingness to sweat the boring details.

Every client of every agency deserves these things, but they seldom receive them. That's why we keep the clients we win.

We'd be delighted for you to experience the difference first-hand.

Please get in touch at hello@methodical.io