

# L.K.Bennett



## case study

How far is it possible for a luxury fashion retailer to embrace the disciplines of online commerce?

By their very nature, the focus of these brand led businesses is to communicate a unique mix of aspirational beauty and style. So how can you mix online commercial practices with the requirement to maintain highly refined brand values?

This has been the challenge for Kate Smyth, E-Commerce Director at L.K.Bennett in achieving what appears to be a difficult balancing act.

L.K.Bennett was founded as a single store in London in 1990 and has now expanded into an international chain of 120 shops and concessions in the UK, Jersey, Ireland, France and the US and will shortly be offering their fashions, shoes and accessories to department stores throughout the world.

However, it was not until 2007 that the company first launched their online operations. As Kate notes, "Luxury fashion retailers such as L.K.Bennett have been traditionally focussed on delivering exceptional personal service in exclusive stores. Understandably the high end fashion industry has been reluctant to move into this area because of the perceived risks to the brand".

"Quite apart from the concerns over possible brand dilution, says Kate, "our original worry was that the profile of L.K.Bennett customers – busy working mums, business women, affluent older women – suggested that they preferred the in store experience and were not online shoppers. But over the last few years this has changed quite dramatically and coincided with a desire to make our fashions even more accessible through our growing brand presence and the potential of sales from areas and countries where we have no retail presence."

In fact L.K.Bennett was one of the early adopters in their sector – even now some of their main competitors have either not made the move or have launched brand led sites that do not function as online distribution channels.

This move into online required some adjustment to the culture of the company. The proven online practices that deliver successful results – data capture, data management, offers and discounts, ongoing e-mail communications, the focus on the customer journey and the requirement for reactive speed – represented a different way of thinking to their brand and retail led operation.

As Kate notes, “It’s a big investment to set up a transactional website – you need an additional team, new IT and order management software, a fulfilment provider and you need to integrate lots of retail led systems – it’s a big first step for any company so it does have to become profitable”.

“What’s proven really successful is the system’s flexibility. It seems to cope with whatever you throw at it. During the last twelve months we have changed our retail systems, re-launched our website, integrated with our till system, added a new warehouse and integrated with e-Bay on a very, very cost effective basis. The great thing with MNP is that it’s their own product and they have the programming power to quickly create custom build solutions.”

Kate continues, “Online success depends on being systems, software and data led. When I first joined three years ago I had initial reservations about the website and order processing system being run by two separate companies and the interfacing problems that this might cause. Since then the MNP system is now the hub of many of our operations and future plans.”

“What I really like about MNP’s OMS system is that it’s ‘self-service’. Once you are set up you can largely look after things yourself and not be reliant on external help. So for example you can change or add shipping rates, accounts, upload new products, change prices – its all very self manageable.”



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The MNP system has not only been very effective about underpinning the growth of L.K.Bennett’s core online business but paradoxically these additional system developments will help deliver even better customer service and close the gap between the company’s brand and commerce requirements.

“Our vision”, says Kate, “is to move to a true multi-channel integrated operation in which our customers can transact with us in the way they want. So they will be able to purchase in a store, purchase online in a store for out of stock items - or purchase online or via our new mobile store app. The same flexibility will

apply to collections and returns – and MNP systems are a key part of these developments.”

Today, their online operation is at the very top of their ‘store’ rankings. Even more important is the evidence that the success of their website and e-mail marketing activities are creating a significant uplift in retail sales. Customers are browsing the website and the mobile app before visiting in store – which makes the website a valuable marketing tool in L.K.Bennett’s drive towards effective multi-channel marketing.

# MNP



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