Live video shopping has been practised in China since 2013, and from 2017 it has experienced unprecedented success in the country, growing at rates of the order of 280% per year until 2020, according to a report by McKinsey. Live shopping was worth over $300 billion in 2021, compared to half that amount in 2020, and is expected to generate a revenue of $423 billion this year, via 900 specialised sites and over 500 million followers. Louis Vuitton was the first luxury label to trial this commercial format during the pandemic in March 2020, on Chinese site Xiaohongshu, and did not repeat the exercise in Europe.

Luxury houses are still skittish about this new format, concerned about their brand image. For the time being, it is mostly cosmetics brands, multi-brand retailers and e-tailers that have ventured down this road. Like French luxury accessories website Monnier Paris, a pioneer among luxury retailers in the West, which committed resolutely to this format two years ago. “In China, we use live shopping on a daily basis with our local partners Tmall and Douyin. In Asia, more than 10% of our sales come from this channel,” the e-tailer’s CEO Diaa Elyaacoubi told FashionNetwork.com.

“In the last six months, 1 billion live video shopping sessions were broadcast in China, across all sectors! Two thirds of e-tail customers have made purchases that way, while in Europe and the USA the figure is virtually zero. Often, the general public doesn’t even know what [live shopping] is. The market isn’t ready of it yet, it’s still a little complicated,” she added.
Elyaacoubi thinks live shopping is a “promising” sales channel, one that “works very, very well for luxury goods.” She added that “it’s important to have a good presenter, and there must be a certain rapport with the guests. You engage emotionally, you tell a story, and by sharing this kind of content we can boost the desirability of our partner brands.”

Provided you “strike a balance between engagement, technical capabilities and your budget.” The resources needed to deploy this format, in terms of time, staff and investment, notably to hire an influencer - a figure that is often regarded as a must - are indeed significant.

How brands and retailers present themselves and manage sessions is a key aspect of live selling, a format in which two communication modes overlap. The first mode is akin to classic advertising, where a brand addresses a large audience and introduces its products in the most appropriate way, using a script prepared and developed in advance by its marketing staff.

The second mode triggers a direct interaction with customers, like in a shop, hence the need to be able to communicate and react very quickly. “Live shopping is a conversational monologue, the right compromise between broadcasting a major brand advertisement and establishing a bespoke relationship with customers. The public is looking both at the video content and at what the audience says about it,” said Damien Leprini, strategic media planner at advertising agency Gloryparis.

It took several attempts before Parisian department store Le Printemps found the appropriate formula and tone. Essentially, the right balance between a classic teleshopping format and a fun occasion, a jolly, amusing experience that can captivate a web audience. Le Printemps launched its live shopping channel last June. The series is called ‘En mode Printemps’ and is broadcast every other Wednesday evening, some 20 episodes so far.

“Initially, we tried out a number of options. You need to think about all the details and have a clear editorial approach, shaping a narrative that is both impactful and interesting. But at the same time, the whole exercise must remain spontaneous,” said Maud Funaro, head of digital transformation at Le Printemps.

Unlike the majority of competitors, Le Printemps decided not to enlist influencers, and its live shopping sessions revolve around the chain’s personal shoppers, one of the department store’s “ever-present strengths.” Le Printemps has some 60 personal shoppers at its branches in Paris and elsewhere in France.
“[Personal shoppers] are at the heart of our omni-channel strategy. They embody our products, our curatorial ability, and the department store’s vision. They pick the products for the live shopping sessions, which they host. It’s a way for them to introduce themselves, to gain visibility and acquire new customers. We are keen to digitalise and democratise the personal shopper service. It’s also an opportunity for us to talk about how we operate,” said Funaro.

‘En mode Printemps’ sessions feature a theme and a sales consultant as host, plus a model wearing the clothes and accessories on show, and an off-camera speaker who puts forward the online audience’s questions and adds further information, for example about the brands featured, in conversation with the host. The participants’ questions are often extremely practical and product-focused, bridging the information gap that sometimes hampers online shoppers. Of course, not everyone has the ability to host a live video session, and some personal shoppers are wary of taking the plunge.

Le Printemps has therefore organised ad hoc training sessions for its staff, choosing Swedish start-up Bambuser as service provider. The department store broadcasts its live shopping sessions on its website and on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. Contrary to common belief, the main results in terms of sales and appointments booked are generated after the live sessions, as Funaro indicated: “90% of page views and purchases are made during replays. This format is part and parcel of a digital ecosystem.”

Another leading French department store group, Galeries Lafayette, is still sitting on the fence about live shopping. In partnership with the Aploze platform, the group has made two initial tests, from which it has “learned valuable lessons. We are looking for the right positioning in terms of our clientèle. [Galeries Lafayette] means chic, so we want to do a quality job with the right setting, proper lighting and all that,” said Alison Chams Muyard, head of digital at Galeries Lafayette.
Finding the ideal formula in terms of return on investment is crucial for fashion and luxury players. While seemingly straightforward, live video shopping requires plenty of resources, as Chams Muyard underlined: “It’s an expensive business, between the technology to connect with the site, the production costs, the models and fitting sessions and above all the right influencers, who can cost anything up to around €50,000. Not to mention the organisational complexity: making the products available, replacements too in case of damages, and in the right sizes. Above all, you need experts to answer questions. You need to work out beforehand the answers to all the questions that may be asked. For example, we have been asked many questions about CSR.”

**Picking the right presenter**

Having the right presenter is essential. “You must pick very wisely. [Presenters] must be talented live hosts and be capable of learning and becoming knowledgeable about brands, and being reassuring to boot. A number of criteria must be taken into account. The advantage of working with an influencer is that they come with a community of followers,” said Chams Muyard.

Galeries Lafayette has drawn the same conclusions as Le Printemps about the real direct impact of live shopping: “On the French market, no one has been commercially successful during a live session. Many people do fill up a [purchasing] basket, but there are few conversions. However, the real business is done after the session, during replays,” said Chams Muyard.

Galeries Lafayette has decided to concentrate on one-to-one video selling, a formula it adopted during the first lockdown. The pandemic has given further impetus to this remote selling format, which previously struggled to take hold, but which has eventually proved to be extremely productive for premium and luxury brands, as well as for designer labels. “It’s a genuine plus. The feedback is extremely positive: 95% of the service’s users are loyal customers. It responds to an expectation. We are experiencing conversion rates in excess of 30%, and we have multiplied six-fold the revenue generated by this type of remote shopping since 2020,” added Chams Muyard.

Galeries Lafayette has revised its sales support approach by deploying the new technological tools available, and added this new dimension to its staff training programmes. One-to-one appointments can be booked either via a personal shopper or the chain’s website. If a customer clicks on a brand’s dedicated page, they will be connected directly to the brand consultant present, otherwise they can ask for a Galeries Lafayette personal shopper. The latter,

*Louis Vuitton tested live video shopping in China in 2020 - jingdaily.com*
to the brand consultant present, otherwise they can ask for a Galeries Lafayette personal shopper. The latter, armed with their smartphones, will reserve a slot where they can showcase the products in question, either choosing from the in-store range or from a pre-set list.

This format has been adopted by number of retailers and major labels since the start of the pandemic. In May 2020, Gucci deployed the Gucci Live video shopping service, which enables customers to video call directly the label’s sales consultants, operating from a make-believe luxury shop. They are actually based in an ad hoc venue with cameras and lighting, showcasing Gucci products and located at Gucci 9, the label’s international client service department, whose first centre was set up in Florence in 2019. Last year, Gucci Live was made available also outside Europe, in Asia and the USA.

With the exception of a few initiatives deployed by a limited number of their labels, leading luxury groups are still monitoring the live video shopping phenomenon as mere observers, testing the waters and trialling the technology. In August 2021, LVMH inked a one-year deal with commercial streaming specialist Bambuser, allowing the group’s labels and divisions to use the start-up’s platform. While Kering acquired a minority stake in US live shopping platform NTWRK last September.

By Dominique Muret