



Why luxury brands are sliding into the DMs

From Dior's Close Friends sneak peek to LV DMing show photos, this men's fashion week, brands got personal on Instagram. Could this be luxury's next social strategy?

By Madeleine Schulz



"Hey — wanted you to be the first to see details of the collection from tonight's LV Men's show. Sending some pics soon," Pharrell Williams wrote in a DM to Albert Ayal, the talent scout behind the fashion Instagram account @UpNextDesigner, on 24 June. The message came via the @Skateboard Instagram, where the creative director and his team share behind-the-scenes shots from Louis Vuitton. Ayal immediately took a screenshot and shared it to his Instagram story.

Ayal wasn't the only fashion creator with a luxury brand sliding into the DMs, or getting more personal, this menswear season. Bally messaged sustainable fashion creator and consultant Scott Staniland a photo of himself from the brand's Milan presentation (posted to Staniland's story). Maison Margiela invited fashion critic Ashantéa Austin to its couture show via DM (which Austin screenshotted and shared via a reel). And, ahead of Jonathan Anderson's menswear debut, Dior added content creator and fashion critic Hanan Besovic (@IDeserveCouture) to its Close Friends story, where the brand shared sneak peaks of Anderson's mood board images and handbag designs. Besovic shared snippets on both TikTok and Instagram.

"It was completely unexpected," Besovic says of his Dior Close Friends access, through which he was one of the first to gain a glimpse of Anderson's Jean-Michel Basquiat reference photo and a reimaged Dior Book tote (now adorned with the actual titles of novels; a bright-yellow version with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was in the preview). It's a refreshing means of engagement, Ayal agrees. "I thought it was so cool," he says of his LV DM. "It felt personal in a way that you don't always get from a brand that big."

It's a timely play. As consumers express desire for personal touch and better communication, brands are looking to level up their marketing strategies to meet these needs. It's also a method for brands to cut through the noise, and speak through creators with super-engaged followings — versus risking getting





lost among the algorithmically ordered feeds of regular brand posts and paid advertisements. “Consumers want to feel a personal connection with the brands they buy from,” says Olivia Houghton, insights and engagement director at consumer insights company The Future Laboratory. “Using intimate features such as DMs or Close Friends [stories] not only encourages consumers to develop a sort of parasocial relationship with the brand, but also leans into co-creation strategies.”

It enables luxury brands to do so while retaining a level of exclusivity, says Katie Baron, content director at trends intelligence agency Stylus, after social media has made all brands more open and accessible. “It connects to the need for luxury brands to reinstate a semblance of mystery; to claw back a level of exclusivity that counters the demystification we’ve seen in a million behind-the-scenes videos,” Baron says.

Ultimately, brands need to be evolving their social strategies beyond ultra-refined advertisements and curated feeds. Though not every brand will — or should — be shitposting on their Instagram accounts or rolling out a fresh suite of internet trend-led TikTok videos, they do need to modernise their online presence. These high-touch social features could offer a happy medium. “[It feels like] a new direction that Dior is going in,” Besovic says, “which is joining us in 2025.”

Personal level

The approach makes it feel like an actual person is running the account, says Staniland, after Bally DMd him a photo of himself from its Milan presentation. Ayal likens it to getting a message from your favourite celebrity. “That kind of interaction really sticks with you,” he says, adding that it now feels like the door is open — with a direct line to both Williams and Vuitton.

This leans into the logic of the parasocial relationships users develop with their favourite celebrities and creators. In this, brands are borrowing from entertainment, offering fashion insiders a line of communication to the brand via a gated channel, free of the regular back and forth. Besovic recalls when Billie Eilish’s team added fans to the singer’s Close Friends in 2024. “I like the fact that fashion is learning from the entertainment industry,” he says. “The line between fashion and entertainment is becoming thinner day by day.”

Quieter content strategies can work well, says Eve Lee, founder of marketing agency The Digital Fairy. “The rise of more introverted branded content and creators allows for slower but much more sophisticated storytelling,” she says. It’s also more current, and Ayal hopes that more brands will hop on board. “I think more brands should be doing this — creating those Close Friends moments, sliding into DMs — just making the whole experience feel fun and social in a way that fits how we communicate now,” says Ayal.

This doesn’t mean brands need to be sharing daily updates. In fact, they shouldn’t, experts caution, at risk of the novelty wearing off. “If they just post random stuff for the sake of posting, I think that takes away the cool part of Close Friends,” Besovic says. Creators aren’t expecting constant communication, either. “It’s probably more of a ‘tap in when it makes sense’ kind of thing,” Ayal says. “But just knowing that connection exists is exciting in itself.”

Breaking through the noise

The premise of this direct line to creators is that it’s a more private, personal brand connection. But it could actually foster greater reach for luxury brands looking to hit the feeds of their target consumers.

“I am known to talk about stuff like this and anything related to fashion on my social media,” Besovic says. “[Brands] are pretty smart to figure that out — they know who will be shocked by it, who can make light of the situation, and, above all, who can get the message across.” Ayal agrees, he expects that brands know fashion creators are likely to share the private exchange. “A DM feels personal, but





it's also something creators feel comfortable posting to their stories — like, 'Look how cool this is!'" he says. "It creates this organic buzz."

It's a relatively low-lift strategy for brands attuned to fashion's internet. But is it enough? In Lee's view, this strategy is missing a layer. Brands are dipping their toes, but not going all the way. "The Close Friends approach shows that they can actually see the value in more relaxed communication methods, but are too risk-averse to fully embrace it," she says. Lee points to brands like Jacquemus and Telfar as examples of those actively working with creators in more expansive ways. "[They] are creating very nuanced internet chaos, community-building horizontally not vertically, and they almost feel more chic for it. True digital sophistication would mean understanding that community and luxury aren't mutually exclusive and when embraced together they can be a powerful brand storytelling device."

Still, it can engender goodwill with the creators who are becoming evermore powerful in an increasingly fragmented media industry. While a brand can buy an ad in a magazine, there are less standardised strategies for ensuring these high-engagement commentators are talking about a show or collection. By opening a direct line, brands create an easy path for these creators to share content around their projects — whether or not a creator is at the show. "Knowing that Pharrell had seen my work and appreciated the support made me want to champion the collection even more," Ayal says. "It definitely got me excited and made the whole thing feel more connected and intentional."

For the strategy to have longevity, though, brands need to go beyond one-way posting, Lee flags. "Artificial hierarchies can be tacky," she says, recommending that brands instead invest in digital creator relationships. By doing so, they can connect to the collaborative spirit of the internet and build community. "This could be really expansive to luxury brands that have previously held the creator economy at arms length."

Besovic hasn't seen any activity on Dior's Close Friends story since the sneak preview. "Maybe they removed me," he jokes. But he's keen for more content, and would hope to see more imagery related to forthcoming shows and drops, as well as the inspiration behind and the references for collections. He will also continue to share this content with his loyal followers — as long as it's good. "If I see more Close Friends posts, I might post about them on my account. But there has to be a story and interest behind it."

Comments, questions or feedback? Email us at feedback@voguebusiness.com.

