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Virtual Shop Fronts: Digital Retail Design's Top Agencies

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ONLINE/ECOMMERCE

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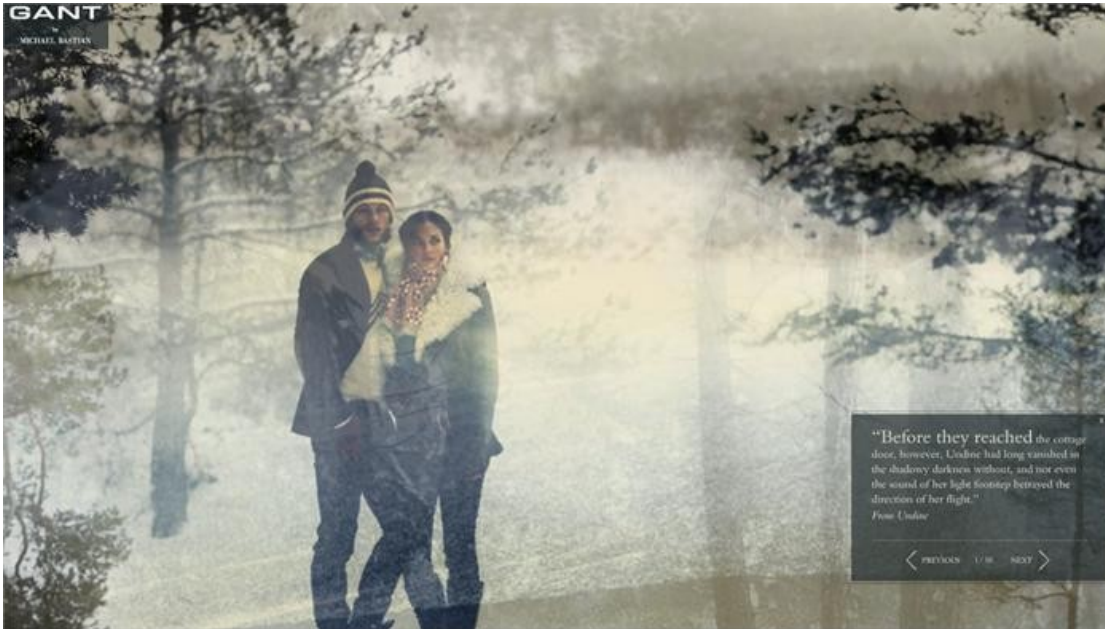
Gant US website

Bureau for Visual Affairs
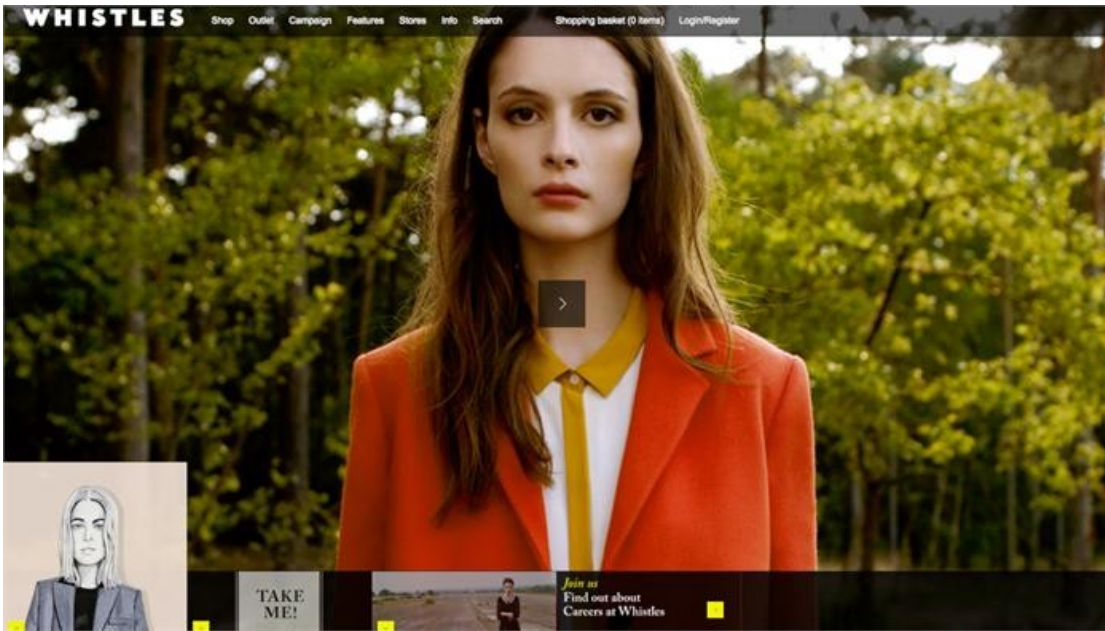
Location: London, UK

Clients: Luxury fashion labels Burberry and Louis Vuitton, and UK fashion retailer Whistles, for which it recently completed a new e-commerce site.

About: Bureau for Visual Affairs (BVA) is a master of **maximising sales opportunities without compromising carefully cultivated brand languages**. The objective for Whistles was to boost the number of buying opportunities, while avoiding 'hard sell' tactics.

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The key concept was to not divide retail from the brand side of things, but to allow the customer to buy from pretty much anywhere on the site through a straightforward process," explains BVA founder Simon Piehl. "See something in the new campaign shots you like? Don't trawl through the shop to try and find it - simply click the icon on the photograph.

This approach to **making every visual surface a potential point of sale** is supported by an internal editorial tool that allows Whistles' HQ-based staff to refresh the site with a constant influx of rolling seasonal campaign imagery. The strategy shrewdly dovetails with recognised patterns of gender-centric shopping behaviour, which asserts that, for female shoppers, a 'see it, want it, now' attitude is rife. (For more on this, see our report: **The Gender Divide, Online**).

Whistles website
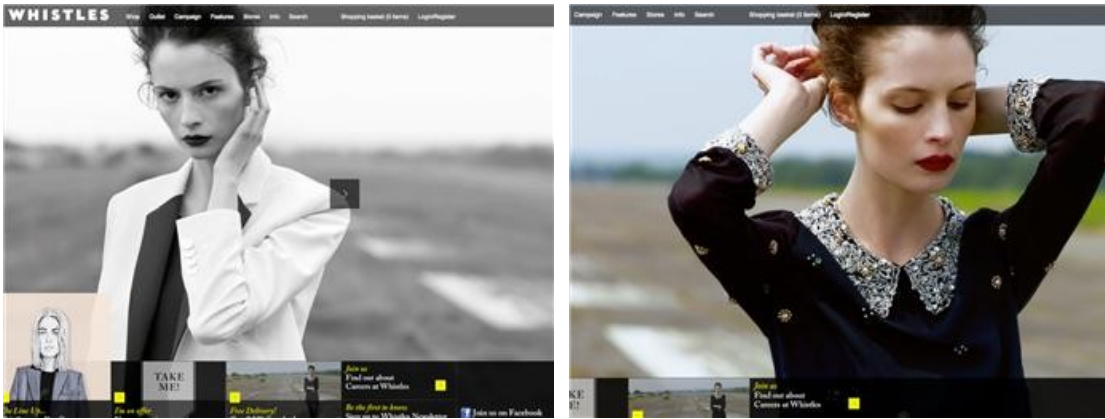
Whistles website

Whistles website

Poke

Location: New York, USA and London, UK

Clients: Range from UK high-street fashion retailer Topshop to telecommunications brand Orange.

About: Poke is an award-winning digital agency renowned for its culturally savvy wit and tangential approach to tackling e-tail. Its youthful outlook also makes it one of the key agencies handling social commerce (social media-driven e-tailing).

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We seek to align the needs of business and consumer through the hard mechanics of commerce and the soft gooey goodness of brand," says creative director and founding partner Nicholas Roope. *"The rapid emergence of **social media has created even more pressure on brands to think and act holistically.**"*

One of the most outstanding examples of that thinking remains the 2009 Baker Tweet project for trendy East London café The Albion. The project used Twitter to tell customers when fresh bread was ready. While putting the new venue on the map, it was also practical, cheeky and a smart way to humanise a digital interface.

Similarly innovative and humour-fuelled projects for UK fashion brand French Connection include a YouTube fashion boutique called **Youtique** for women, including click-to-buy videos, and a separate menswear site called **Manifesto** – designed to "indulge modern manliness".

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French Connection Manifesto

Baker Tweet at The Albion

French Connection Youtique

French Connection Manifesto

French Connection Manifesto

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Lundgren+Lindqvist

Location: Gothenburg, Sweden

Clients: Credit card company American Express, telecommunications brand Ericsson and Swedish clothing brand Elvine, for which it recently developed a new website, uniting the previously separate brand page with its transactional site.

About: Web design and development agency Lundgren+Lindqvist has established a reputation for applying the same levels of stylish graphic design to both print and digital formats. The Elvine site was conceived with a heavily editorial landing page, and the design emphasis is on pushing brand identity without any hard sell. Lundgren+Lindqvist used Wordpress (best-known as a blogging platform) as an off-the-peg content management system for the landing page, while using a separate e-commerce platform for the shop.

Partner Andreas Friberg Lundgren believes that it's essential not to simply copy a print strategy onto an online retail environment, but to include blogging and other online editorial and marketing concepts.

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*To us, it is clear that **every company will need a web editor,*** says Lundgren

Elvine website

Elvine website

Elvine website

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Wednesday London

Location: London, UK

Clients: From luxury fashion labels including Armani and Balenciaga, to fashion e-tailer Net-A-Porter's new Mr Porter site and high-street giant H&M.

About: Wednesday London is the digital arm of branding agency Saturday London, and specialises in design for fashion e-commerce. It is renowned for delivering a sleek, expensive-looking finished product.

CEO Oliver Walsh believes that the key to **successful e-tail design lies in creating a smooth visual synergy between all off and online domains** – via a visual language which links the various platforms without any one directly replicating another.

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We always ask clients: 'If a blogger pulled a picture from your website, would it be obvious where it came from?'," says Walsh. "The majority of clients are established and have a strong [offline] brand presence, but either way, we have to be super aware of what they want to become known for in a digital space. We believe in tailoring an ecosystem around visual design.

Armani website

Versace for H&M website
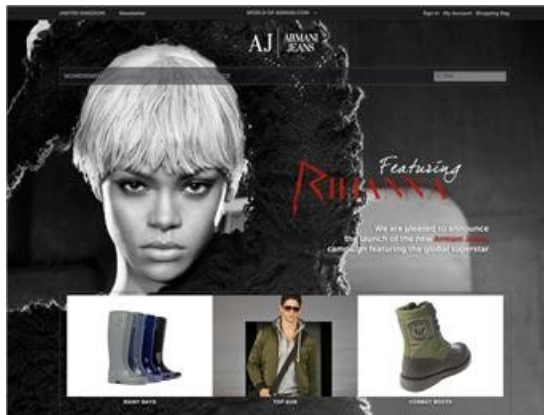
Armani website

Code and Theory

Location: New York and San Francisco, USA

Clients: Recently completed a relaunch of lifestyle brand Gant US.

About: Award-winning agency Code and Theory specialises in full service digital design and video production. Vice-president of social and media strategy Ivan Kayser explains that the power of sensory perception and the physicality of purchasing was the main inspiration behind the re-design. The result was the incorporation of a 'shoppable' video.

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*We had to create experiences that were functional, but also gave **the illusion of physical interaction with the product**,"* explains Kayser

How to deal with Gant's hierarchy of products was another major consideration – one that many heritage brands deal with regularly. "We knew that all products were not equal. Some are functional easy purchases, while others are luxuries." The result is simple but effective compartmentalisation, with the heritage sections having a stronger bias towards detail and lifestyle information.

Gant US website

Gant US website

Stylus Summary

Good e-tail design is anchored in the bond between a strong visual identity and smart, tech-based strategy. Understanding how one informs the other is vital in ensuring brand connections across multiple channels.

As digital culture expands at speed, the need for 'web editors' who can control and synchronise on and off-line identities is becoming increasingly important.

Technological developments that add a more humanising aspect to a digital interface (whether via video or cheeky tweets) can be hugely valuable in helping consumers make the leap into online shopping. Humour and surprise can be seductive weapons in any e-tailer's arsenal.

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