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## Moda Operandi Takes Manhattan With Town House Showroom

Profitable showroom model is being expanded around the world.

By [Sharon Edelson](#) on November 23, 2016



Moda Operani

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Earlier this fall, online operator [Moda Operandi](#) opened its first U.S. showroom in Manhattan. The three-level, 3,200-square-foot space is in a

town house at 24 East 64th Street, a quiet, leafy block just off Madison

town house at 27 East 64th Street, a quiet, leafy block just off Madison Avenue.

For Moda Operandi, whose customers spend an average of \$1,200 online, the showroom concept is a key strategy, given that its clients spend four times that amount, or \$4,800, when they shop in person.

Moda customers shop online seven times a year, including twice a year for pre-fall, twice a year for runway and three times for in-season product. "We have a very high retention rate," said Deborah Nicodemus, chief executive officer. "Our new growth client file is up by 72 percent."

Nicodemus plans to build on the successful London showroom in Belgravia, called the Mews showroom, which launched in September 2014. "We achieved our fourth-quarter plan within the first month of opening," said Nicodemus. She declined to divulge sales per square foot but said that the showrooms pay for themselves within the first year.

Nicodemus plans to open 15 more showrooms in the next five years, including one in Abu Dhabi in 2017, followed by another location in the Middle East, and then, showrooms in Hong Kong and Seoul.

"After that, we'll backfill with three more locations in the Continental U.S.," Nicodemus said, adding that Texas, California and Florida are on her list. "We'll also enter Canada and open three additional showrooms in Europe."

It took Moda 18 months to find the 64th Street location. Nicodemus said she was extremely discerning, as one might expect the ceo of an e-commerce site with some of the highest price points in cyberspace to be.

"We wanted a town house off Madison Avenue," she said, noting that opening a showroom on the popular shopping thoroughfare would have defeated the objectives of exclusivity and providing clients with privacy.

"The London Mews showroom is on a beautiful private street," Nicodemus said, adding that she wanted to learn about the showroom model from an international business perspective, so she opened the London unit first.

It took Moda two years to understand how to operate the showroom, being that it was geographically removed in London and has a non-inventory model. But the company figured it out and "we became very successful at it," Nicodemus said.

"The Moda Madison and Moda Muse London are operated by an



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invitation-only model,” she added. “Because it’s invitation-only, we’re not set up to host clients that would come via foot traffic.”

Referrals to showrooms come from Modi Operandi stylists, who do everything for their clients from helping them pull wardrobes together online to packing their luggage for travel to taking them to runway shows. “Our online clients view luxury as time — she doesn’t want to scroll through [hundreds] of items, so she asks a stylist to pull looks for her,” Nicodemus said. “Clients also value Mode Operandi bringing the experience to their homes.”

Serving customers in their homes accounts for 5 to 10 percent of the business, Nicodemus said.

The showroom can accommodate a single customer to up to five clients, individually. Every appointment is merchandised specifically for that customer. “It’s designed for a unique experience,” Nicodemus said. “When a client comes, we convert the entire showroom for her.”

About 400 customers are expected to visit the New York showroom each year.

“The goal is to keep the setting very elevated and the experience exclusive, so the client acquisition will be more organic,” Nicodemus said. If someone arrives at the showroom through the recommendation of another client but has never worked with a stylist, Moda will pair her up with one.

The other way to gain entry to the showroom is to attend one of the events on Moda’s monthly calendar, which include trunk shows for ordering next season’s styles. Besides its in-season business, Moda launches some 20 trunk shows a day online.

The north salon, with its salmon-colored sofa and marble-topped end tables, is dedicated to fur, bridal, runway and couture. Sold only in the showrooms, couture accounts for 10 percent of Moda sales.

“I had an idea that we would do well with couture,” Nicodemus said, adding that stylists send a digital couture look book of four designers with five to 10 dresses each to couture clients. After the designers and/or dresses are chosen, Moda will send a

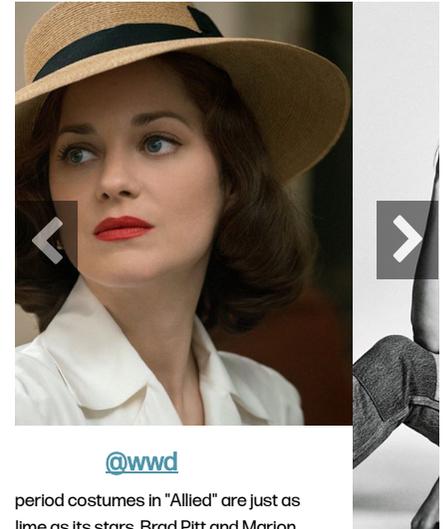
customized book — Nicodemus called it a “very on-brand Moda

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“I look  
too  
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experience” — that contains the customer’s selections, including a bill of materials. Then, the first fitting is scheduled, which may result in two to three additional fittings over a four-month period.

“I do a lot of experimenting and testing,” Nicodemus said. “I wanted to carry over the same couture idea to fine jewelry. “When a stylist says a client is interested in a certain piece, we curate several designers and send a look book to the client with the options.”

Nicodemus said stylists are a key element of the Moda Operandi experience. The company’s 25 stylists, based in New York, Los Angeles and London, know what’s in their customers’ closets, so they can work new pieces into existing wardrobes.

“The goal is to have 80 stylists in the next five years,” Nicodemus said. “Stylists have to have a keen sense of fashion and they have to have worked in the fashion industry. They’re not transactional. They get a base salary, which is quite substantial compared with other stylists in the industry. They want to cater to clients’ dreams.”

She gave an example of a client who visited Moda Mews and was interested in a \$300,000 Cleopatra-style necklace with sprays of blue semi-precious stones. Her stylist suggested she try out the necklace for the evening. Meanwhile, he e-mailed a photo of the necklace to her husband, who bought it for her for her birthday.

Working with a stylist also ensures clients get first dibs on runway looks. “When clients view runway online and place orders, we consolidate the orders with the brand,” Nicodemus said. “When a stylist shows runway photos to a client, we place a bulk order to make sure we get the item.”

The Madison showroom on a recent morning was being transformed into a holiday gift guide, with items from \$500 to \$5,000, and stocking stuffers under \$100. Gifts at the showroom included a Kelly bag, \$110,000, a Louis Vuitton vintage trunk and a white mink coat, \$18,000. There’s 500 additional gift ideas online.

Laura Santo Domingo, Moda Operandi’s founder and creative director, oversaw the interior design. She worked with 1stdibs on

the furnishings and hung soft de Gournay wallpaper in the townhouse. Nicodemus said Parisian jewelry designer Lydia Courteille's collection, which was on display, is an example of the unusual products Moda seeks. A ring with opal, Paraiba tourmaline, rubies and sapphires is shaped like a vase with flowers and a necklace with tanzanite, sapphires, light sapphires and rubies looks like a flower and buds.

 [Hermès](#) [Moda Operandi](#)

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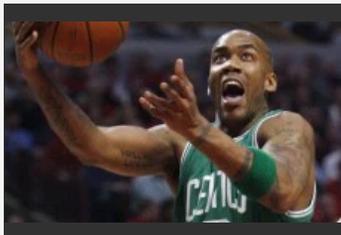


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