

Gucci on the Hudson, Where Customer Service Is Center Stage

The center is the fifth of its kind in the world.

By [Sharon Edelson](#) on November 13, 2019



Gu Gucci 9 Hudson's elevated aesthetic borrows the aesthetics of global stores. Product displays give call center employees hands-on access to bestsellers.
Brian Berkowitz

[Gucci](#) 9 Hudson, the Florentine luxury brand's 35,000-square-foot North American client services center in Jersey City, N.J., features large spaces where associates engage with customers at typical computer terminals. But the environment is more chic than the usual phone center, with rounded windows that offer natural light and sweeping views of the Hudson River and Manhattan skyline.

Designed by [Alessandro Michele](#), [Gucci](#)'s creative director, the client services center represents the brand's aesthetic and

registers a level of recognition similar to the company's stores. Light orange paneled woodwork contrasts with green carpeting and parventi or sectional screens in the same color scheme break up the spaces.

Like a physical showroom, the center features vignettes of bestsellers, including in ready-to-wear, handbags, leather goods and footwear. Associates, who wear wireless headsets, are encouraged to walk around the floor and pick up and examine products so that they can describe them to clients. Rather than being static in front of their screens, the company wants them to feel like they're in a retail environment.



Training day. Brian Berkowitz

Marco Bizzarri, Gucci's chief executive officer, discussed the space on Wednesday following a press tour. "The reason why I think we wanted to have the space be so beautiful, in terms of the color, texture and the feeling that's very much the Gucci aesthetic of Alessandro, is that we really believe that if you're surrounded by beauty, then by consequence, when you're surrounded by beautiful things and you smile, it's going to add a lot to the interaction with customers, which is what we want."

The last of five client services centers of the same name — the others are in Florence, Tokyo, Seoul and Singapore — the concept of Gucci 9 is to bring the human touch to the remote service. With 150 associates at the Jersey City location, Gucci expects to employ more than 500 advisers across the five centers by 2020. Together, the centers represent a worldwide network that's creating a global picture of each client. Each center is strategically located in a region to provide proximity to consumers, offering a fully integrated and localized experience.

Gucci 9 Hudson treats all inbound calls the same way, regardless of the origin of the inquiry. Associates are taught to be channel-agnostic. “We don’t care if you’re a client that mainly shops at a store or a client who mainly goes online. What we want to know is what you desire now. What can we do for you irrespective of where you’re calling from,” Bizzarri said.

The facility, Bizzarri said, contains a multinational, multilingual workforce that connects with Gucci’s diverse, global audience over the phone or via computer. Providing Gucci customers around the world with a direct connection to the brand’s community is meant to be seamless, always accessible and personalized, he said.

Gucci talks the talk, paying a lot of attention to voice quality. A session in progress at Gucci 9 Hudson’s training room, which incidentally looks like the brand’s Milan showroom with the same color scheme, was underway. The brand has developed its own ideas of how to interact with clients, using voice to the best effect. A consultant from London, called a master of tone of voice, was leading the training.

“It’s been scientifically proven, and we’ve collaborated with voice laboratories that have explained, that when you smile, the shape of the mouth changes, so the sound is different,” Bizzarri said. “You can understand if someone is speaking with a smile or not. We believe that a smile has a sound and changes dramatically the way we perceive a person to be speaking.”

Gucci conducts interviews at the Jersey City facility using a new approach — candidates turn their back to the interviewer. “Nobody sees the faces of the people,” Bizzarri said. “We try to understand what kind of empathy could come through the telephone. We want to hear the empathy and the enthusiasm and how you’re going to have a human touch. Any kind of bias, be it cultural, gender or nationality, doesn’t exist. This has created a unique approach in the way in which we hire people.”

There’s plenty of space at the center for added employees. Now servicing 41 stores in the U.S. and Canada, Gucci 9 Hudson continues to ramp up and take on additional stores and locations. The seats are expected to fill up fast early in 2020, and next year could see expansion to coverage of Gucci shop-in-shops at Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman Marcus and

Bloomingdale's.

The front line, where the inbound calls come in, is the first stop. It's the operational side of shopping and comes with a promise that the product will be delivered in six days. However, it's not simply shipping, returns are handled here as well. How fast a product can be picked up, checked into the warehouse and cleared for payment to be returned or for an exchange to be made can build or erode loyalty. Because the network is interconnected, Gucci 9 Hudson's metrics can be seen on a screen along with the performance of other locations.

In another area, a large wall monitor shows the Gucci web site translated to 3-D by Powerfront. Avatars representing the live consumers browsing the site are color-coded to identify various types of visitors. New shoppers are blue, returning clients are yellow, and those who are logged in and made purchases have a symbol over their heads. The data is used to understand clients' behavior on the web site, in the same way stores analyze shopping patterns, so that Gucci can improve service.

The center has developed and is piloting a tool that can help associates by translating voice into script. "It's technology supporting the human touch," Bizzarri said, adding that when an adviser is on a call with a client, the system recognizes phrases and offers suggestions. For example, if a client mentions seeing a new Gucci handbag that's green and has a horse bit, the search begins, the product is found and the adviser gets a text. The adviser has more time to talk to the client, doesn't have to put the customer on hold. The program is learning Gucci terminology and how to put those phrases into script.

Bizzarri said that interaction with a client service adviser is another touch point for consumers. "The more touch points, the more knowledge of the client we have, and the average order volume goes up," he said. "It's the same thing in the shops. The more you interact, you create this kind of empathy. Luckily, we have many, many customers. We have one problem that you face when you call the shops — you're not able to get an answer because everybody is busy. It's impossible [for sales associates] to stay on the phone longer because they'll lose the sale. In this way we're able to make an interface between the customer and the shops seamless."

The ceo called Gucci 9 Hudson one of the most beautiful of the client services centers, noting that he'll probably hear from the other four units. Having Michele's input is "uncommon," he said. "Alessandro is kind of a strange bird. He's the only creative director to look at all aspects and everything that's related to the brand. He loves that. I remember when he saw pictures of this place and where it's located. The feeling he had, he was so happy and wanted to create something unique for this location."



Alessandro Michele Gucci
