Trends

Jérémy Vosse, luxury concierge: "The lockdown forced us to say 'no' to our clients for the first time."

Top footballers, VIPs from luxury brands, movie stars, and African dignitaries… Jérémy Vosse, founder of "Premium Conciergerie," is used to asking the impossible of his clients. They quickly realized that not everything is for sale. Interview.

By Corinne Bouchouchi
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Jérémy Vosse, founder of Premium Conciergerie ROMAIN MENORET

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The first time we met Jérémy Vosse was in the lounges of the Prince de Galles, a Parisian luxury hotel where he is a regular. Wearing a crisp white shirt and dark suit, with a relaxed demeanor and an ever-present smile, the fifty-something, founder of the ultra-high-end concierge service Premium Conciergerie, told us about the customs and practices of a select clientele whose most extravagant desires had to be satisfied *"in just a few minutes"* : arranging a round-the-world trip in 48 hours, transforming a Parisian apartment into an African jungle for a birthday party, tracking down a rare pair of sneakers, or securing a table at a fully booked restaurant…

It was January. For the ultra-rich, Paris was the epitome of luxury and, after Milan, was preparing to host Fashion Week. The Covid bombshell hadn't yet exploded. Five months later, we wondered how this very particular segment of the population had experienced lockdown. And we found the business leader a little groggy but resolutely optimistic, convinced that the world after could very well resemble the world before… Interview.

You've just joined the highly selective American network of travel agencies, Virtuoso, a key player in the luxury travel industry. Is business picking up?

This is excellent news for us. We're joining a very exclusive circle of travel agencies accessible only by invitation—a first for a French concierge service. For our clients, it guarantees VIP treatment during their travels: access to a selection of exclusive hotels and resorts, with upgrades upon arrival, preferential air services, flexible check-in times… Let's be honest, for an entrepreneur—I founded this concierge service six years ago after working in the music and video game industries—this health crisis has been a major blow. But things are looking up. A week ago, a major jewelry brand from Place Vendôme entrusted us with a significant project. It's still too early to celebrate, but the signs are positive.

Your concierge service initially made a name for itself with top-level footballers. Now you're mentioning a high-end jewelry brand. What does your business consist of, and who are your clients?
We have four types of clients. Indeed, we have been deeply influenced by the world of football since our inception, with many top international players among our members. But we also have a foothold in the world of cinema. And for about two years now, we have been developing two new lines of business. On the one hand, we cater to institutional and very wealthy clients in Central and West African countries. And in parallel, we have a more corporate branch with a presence in haute couture and fine jewelry. For example, during Paris Fashion Week, groups ask us to take care of their clients. We handle their travel arrangements, from booking flights to providing a chauffeur. We create events for them: a tour of France's finest classified wines, an olfactory experience with renowned perfumers, or even "private" theatrical performances showcasing the products of the host brands.

No more travel, no more shopping, no more shows… Your job lost all meaning when the lockdown was announced!
It was brutal and sudden, for us as for everyone else. No one expected it, no one was prepared. Our job is to find hotels all over the world, book flights, choose restaurants, buy incredible clothes. All at once, when the lockdown hits and the whole planet stops, we realize we can't work anymore! That's what shut down first. And for the first time, we had to say "no" to our clients…

Did you ever think about closing down?

We suffered. But we never stopped doing our job. Right from the start, when we realized something serious was happening, we began by alerting our clients. And in particular, by bringing back those who were on the other side of the world, whatever the reason. A few days before the official announcements, we told them they had very little time to decide… They all came back.

However, the entire corporate side of our business came to a complete halt, as did requests from our African clients. In any case, they couldn't travel anymore. And in their own countries, they don't need us…

Our other clients continued to request our services. The requests were just different. They were more limited and outside their usual routines. For example, they asked us for things as mundane as diapers for their youngest child or groceries. They didn't want to, or dared to, go to the stores. So we did their shopping, then disinfected the items, before delivering them to their doorstep.

No more gourmet restaurants and fine wines, you were just getting your groceries from the local Franprix?
Of course! Actually, we adapted to the constraints of the different European countries where our customers live. In France, it wasn't easy. Not everything was available, there were long queues, products were out of stock… But we made it a point of honor to find everything they asked for, when they wanted it, and according to their needs. So, the football players found themselves confined like you and me, but they needed to stay in shape, to prepare for a return to play whose date they didn't know. Many asked us to find sports equipment.

Did your football players urgently need yoga mats?
No, not really yoga mats. But they had to train, and not all of them have gyms at home. They needed running machines, dumbbells, weights, everything a top-level athlete needs. And all the stores that could supply them were closed. I can tell you it was complicated. But we managed. We started buying or renting them from hotel partners who were closed anyway. Then we succeeded in getting the warehouses of a well-known sporting goods brand reopened. That day, I can tell you we bought a lot of things from them…

Finding sports equipment for top-level players is no small matter.
Overall, have your customers been reasonable?
We're extremely close to our members. Oddly enough, the lockdown allowed us to get even closer, to communicate a great deal. We sensed a real need for advice, on a TV series to watch, a book to read, a board game to discover as a family… It was clear we weren't going to put ourselves above the law and have stores open to get them a designer bag or anything like that. I preferred to use my energy to find hand sanitizer, gloves, and masks.
Overall, our customers were very understanding and supportive. It's a shock that has turned our lives upside down, theirs as well as ours. They had the same fears, the same anxieties as we did. The only difference is that they had a little more space than we did in their homes…

Were your younger clients just as understanding?
They were just as kind, but they had a little more trouble grasping what was happening. A few days after the lockdown, they were still asking us to organize trips for them… We had to explain that even by private jet, it wasn't possible! We gave them a bit of a shake-up, but after about ten days, and a lot of "No!", they finally understood. For them, there's usually no "No." They would tell me: "But you always manage to get things done, you'll find a solution, you'll call so-and-so…"

For these clients, hearing "no" is a shock? In any case, they're not used to it. And they really had to change their habits. From the very beginning of the lockdown, we called back all our household staff—cleaners, cooks, and so on—for their safety. They understood, but for the first time, some had to learn how to cook pasta. We also noticed that some of "our" athletes very often put frozen pizzas on their shopping lists. After a while, we diplomatically advised them to diversify their meals. They're sometimes very young, but they also know that their bodies are their best asset. They quickly understand where their best interests lie. Once

the initial shock has passed, do you think your clients will resume their lives as before, as if nothing had happened?
There might be a few minor adjustments. But frankly, I believe that once the crisis is behind us, life will go back to normal. Our clients will start spending again, traveling, and shopping. It's their life. Should we be saddened by this? Personally, I enjoy bringing smiles to my members' faces, and I'm happy to see restaurant terraces reopening, and soon all the hotels.

Today, we sense a deep desire among them to travel, to get out of the country. We advise them to wait until June 15th to choose their destinations, once the European governments have made their decisions. In the meantime, we're preparing Plan A options for dream trips to faraway countries, Plan B options for trips within Europe, and Plan C options for France. We'll then make our final decisions. For now, our main focus is on vacations. No extraordinary requests yet. But that will come back. And I hope so, because I quite liked this life before. It's my job.

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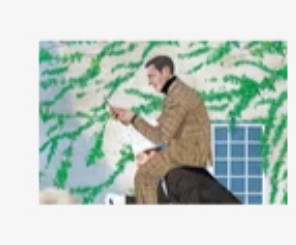

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By Corinne Bouchouchi

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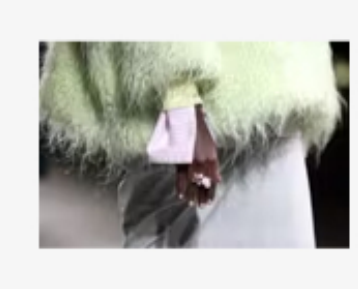

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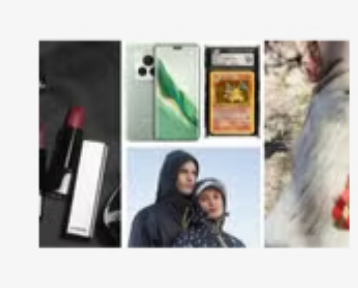

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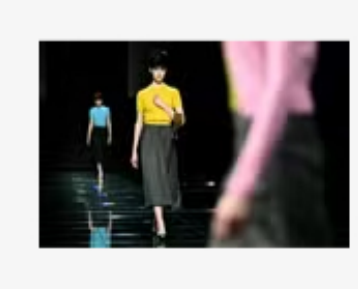

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