

Inside Ralph Lauren's new white-label AI styling tool

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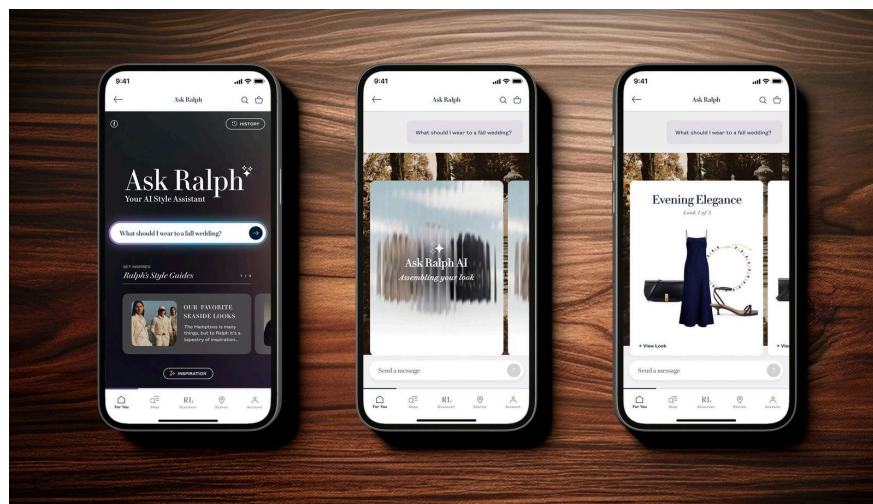
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Chief branding and innovation officer David Lauren is betting on generative AI to improve personalisation and customer engagement at the heritage brand. Just under 25 years ago, Ralph Lauren [launched](#) what it pitched as the first luxury brand e-commerce site to land on the internet, Polo.com, which it built in collaboration with Microsoft. Today, the brand is bringing that collaboration into the AI era, with the launch of 'Ask Ralph', its conversational shopping and styling tool for its US mobile app users.

The goal is to give prospective customers the ability to discover and style Ralph Lauren products to create outfits that reflect the brand's "distinctive look and attitude", says chief branding and innovation officer David Lauren.

"It's the ultimate authoritative style guide to get the look of Ralph Lauren," Lauren says. "Getting dressed is a part of building your persona and your connection with the world, but you probably don't have the liberty to call a salesperson every day to ask how you get dressed. Now, you can work with your iPhone in your pocket and it will comfortably guide you. Our goal is to become that styling authority for you."



The Ask Ralph initial search prompt and recommended shoppable visual laydownPhoto: Courtesy of Ralph Lauren

As ChatGPT maker Open AI and Google race to replace websites and become consumers' go-to online shopping destinations with their AI shopping tools, Ralph Lauren's decision to launch its own branded AI tool reflects a broader desire among heritage brands to editorialise and retain control of their customers' product discovery. Microsoft has also worked with Clarins to launch Clara, its conversational AI agent, to answer customer queries in the brand's voice.

As competition heightens among brands to create similar AI shopping tools that reflect their DNA, investors are backing a whole cottage industry of software startups that develop white-label AI shopping assistants to sell to retailers. The last few months have also seen investors bet big on an expected rapid adoption of AI shopping recommendations among consumers, as they pour millions into [AI personal styling apps like Daydream, Alta and Doji](#). These startups have developed AI models to create the most advanced photorealistic styling recommendations that the industry has seen, and are ranking high on app stores and social media.

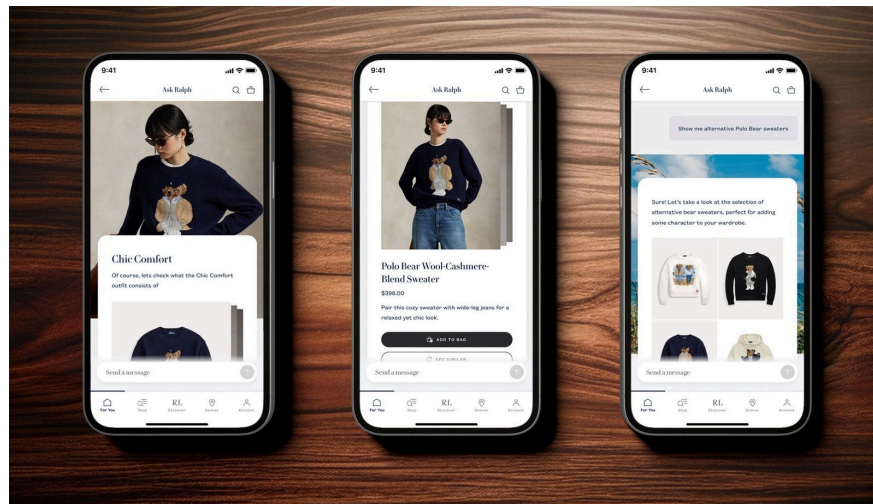
They're directly competing with brands' quests to own the shopping journey end to end, and they can also move much faster than global luxury brands and conglomerates — so the race to create own-brand alternatives is heating up among those who want to keep customers engaged with their own digital storefronts. Ask Ralph recommends entire looks created solely from Ralph Lauren products, whereas major AI search engines and styling apps recommend looks featuring several brands.

"It's not about AI per se, it's about how AI can leverage the things that we love — the kinds of clothes we like, the kinds of styling, the kinds of attitudes and personalities we like — and blend that into a unique sensibility," Lauren says. "Our job at Ralph Lauren is to create beautiful clothes and to tell timeless stories, but to make sure we use technology to stay relevant and at the cutting edge. With AI, we've found the right technology to help us tell the stories we want to tell."

Ask Ralph

These stories take the form of shoppable visual laydowns of fully styled Ralph Lauren looks, which will be recommended based on the natural language search prompts that customers enter into the Ask Ralph tool. The brand partnered with Microsoft using its Azure Open AI service to develop the tool, which is initially

available exclusively to users of the brand's US-only app. Ralph Lauren is using the app as a testing ground to develop the tool in tandem with its wider mobile-first customer engagement strategy — the brand says its “most engaged” (aka highest converting) customers are currently its US app users.



The Ask Ralph tool will refine its recommendations to more detailed user prompts
Photo: Courtesy of Ralph Lauren

The new tool is built on Open AI's latest generative multimodal AI, which understands natural language and semantics, and can also parse images. The brand says the tool, which has been in development for a year, has been trained solely on the brand's own imagery and content. This includes product imagery from Ralph Lauren's online product catalogue archive, PDP imagery, editorial campaigns, style guides and brand language. The tool only recommends looks to customers based on inventory that is available in real time — a feature the brand says distinguishes it from large tech companies' universal AI shopping tools, which can sometimes recommend unavailable products.

Starting today, when customers log into the Ralph Lauren app, they'll be presented with a white search bar and the prompt “ask me anything”, where they can begin their “intent-based” search in natural language — for example, “I need an outfit for my cousin's wedding in Arizona this spring.” The tool then responds with follow-up prompts to help refine its recommendations. Like all generative AI tools, the more detail a customer shares in the open-ended conversation, the more relevant the tool's product recommendations, which are ultimately presented to customers in an interactive shoppable carousel of looks.

"It's a learning curve with the AI — it's going to take a while for it to evolve and work at the level of sophistication of each customer," Lauren says. "But it's going to continue to grow and we're going to continue to learn from it."

For now, the tool is only available for the Polo men's and women's catalogue, but the brand intends to roll it out across its other brands, product categories and markets in the future. Customers can pull up their conversation history with Ask Ralph, but the tool doesn't currently remember user preference data before each new conversation, as ChatGPT does. Conversation memory is also something the brand wants to develop as it refines the tool, to increase this personalisation aspect. It's also looking into incorporating more multimodal search functionalities that may include voice prompts and image-based search. Elsewhere in the business, Ralph Lauren is investing in AI to increase customer acquisition and engagement through more personalised marketing, and to improve predictive inventory management and product demand forecasting.

By launching its customer-facing AI application, Lauren says the brand hopes it will gain an additional feedback loop to understand more about what customers want.

"Our job is to stay as close to our customers as we can, to be constantly listening and learning," Lauren says. "At the same time, we have to have a vision that resonates with them. With AI, we can be even more tuned into our customers and even more responsive. Now, we can constantly feel where and how our brand is resonating with them."