

Watch Brands and Social Networks: A Focus on Facebook

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A form of media that cannot be ignored

The social networking site Facebook has become, in a few short years, the daily meeting point on the Internet for more than 120 million people around the world. If Facebook were a country, it would be the most populated country in Europe. Once people place their profile on the site, everything is in place for them to stay in contact with their friends: messaging, photos, videos, chat rooms, events, fan clubs, etc. The site provides a multitude of services dedicated to content sharing.

Facebook's rapid international expansion has positioned it as the largest community platform in the world, bringing together on one site the greatest socio-demographic variety of users. Created originally for the student world, the Facebook audience in the United States today is composed of 34 percent active workers (professionals, executives, sales, education, technical, etc.), with 45 percent of them aged 35 years or older. This makes a Facebook presence imperative for brands that want to strengthen their image on the Internet and reach a target audience that has great potential.

And the watch brands?

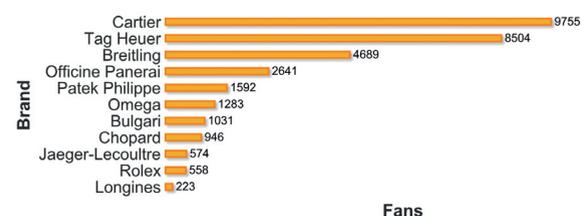
According to a study by Unity Marketing (October 2008), 40 percent of consumers of luxury goods visited a social networking site within the last three months. To analyze this phenomenon, in general, and Facebook, in particular, IC-Agency looked at the Fan Pages of the most popular watch brands. (Each year, IC-Agency publishes the WorldWatchReport and analyzes more than 30 million online searches related to the 12 largest watch brands on the Internet.)

These Fan Pages, reserved for the promotion of products, services, or artists, for example, have the advantage of being indexed on search engines. This allows updates to be sent directly to the Fans, while the creator of the content has total control over how and when it goes out. In other words, these Fan Pages are the 'profiles' of companies that are listed on Facebook. These pages provide visibility for the brands as well as for any activity that requires a certain promotion. IC-Agency has taken an in-depth look at the presence of the Fan Pages belonging to some of the largest watch brands present on Facebook and their number of Fans. The results might surprise you.

Facebook and image: another reality

Our first observation was that the best known brands are not necessarily the most popular on Facebook. Omega and Rolex are clearly out-ranked by Cartier, TAG Heuer, and Breitling. In the WorldWatchReport 2008, which measures the popularity of brands using search volume on Google and other search engines, the situation is different. In this case, Rolex and Omega are ahead of TAG Heuer and Breitling, among others. On Facebook, Cartier occupies the top spot with nearly 10,000 Fans on its Page, followed by TAG Heuer and its 8,500 Fans. In third position is Breitling with more than 4,000 Fans. As each new Fan signs up on the Page of its preferred brand, his entire network of friends is informed. This provides a 'viral' marketing opportunity at minimal cost, which some brands have understood.

Watch Brand Fan Pages on Facebook
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The importance of content and interaction

Two other elements must be taken into consideration to better interpret these results: the quality of the published content and the level of interactions among the Fans. In taking a closer look, the disparities in terms of content quality and activities suggest a whole other situation. For example, the Cartier Fan Page along with its 10,000 Fans resembles a virtual business card and offers only a very brief history of the brand. Breitling Fans add very little content, but often visit the TradePlace. On the other hand, the TAG Heuer Fan Page leaves the others in the dust when it comes to the number of regular updates and the variety of quality content offered—it is clearly the most complete.

Deciphering the best practices of TAG Heuer

In terms of engagement, the Fans of TAG Heuer take particular care in publishing pertinent content, and the brand's Fan Page resembles a lot more than just a mini-website. Here we find key corporate information (company overview, mission, products) and also a very large palette of multi-media and other collaborative content (photo and video albums, events, forums, comments, etc.).

For the watch brand and its distributors, the data collected represents a continuous and free source of information showing how the clients perceive the brand. Notably, the Fans justify their preferences for a certain model in the discussion forum 'Your Favorite TAG', while they give their opinions on the brand's ambassadors in 'Your Favorite TAG Ambassadors'. In the 'Fan Photos' section, they publish photos relating to their TAG experience.

Rolex, the great unknown

How can it be that one of the world's most famous watch brands is hardly present on Facebook? We find only 550 Fans on the site, and almost no content. We looked for an explanation, and it seems we found it elsewhere. Unlike its competitors, the number of 'Groups' (different than Fan Pages) devoted to Rolex is impressive and exceeds 500. This tells us that the followers of the watch brand do not join together on just one page dedicated to Rolex, but prefer instead to log on to groups with different interests such as the 'RolexAppreciation Society' and its 770 members, or 'Rolex Vintage' and 'Rolex Submariner', with more than 600 members each. This does not even count the bling-bling sites that revolve around the venerable brand. In spite of this type of specialization, Rolex is far from the tens of thousands of Fans that gather around its main challenges. But the basic question is: Does the brand really need them?

Be there or be square

When observing the speed at which the number of subscribers to the different Fan Pages on Facebook is increasing, it is clear that the conversations among enthusiasts of the various watch brands represent the most powerful source of client information, one that no professional in the industry can ignore. From a virtual business card to veritable mini-websites full of consumer opinions, the disparities we noted in the management of the different watch brands' images are consequential. It has become, however, easy for a company to listen to its clients and follow their discussions online. The brand that understands how to take full advantage of Facebook will benefit from additional innovative tools to help it master the distribution of its messages on these new and emerging communication channels and to reach a target audience still difficult to capture. A word to the wise. ◀