

MULTICHANNEL

Christie's execs: Humanize ecommerce through passion, education

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Patek Philippe watch sold by Christie's Watch Shop

By JEN KING

NEW YORK - After art sales witnessed tremendous growth with the introduction of online auctions and ecommerce offerings, executives from Christie's explained that this visually-based model was then adapted for Christie's Watch Shop at Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2014 Sept. 9.

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Luxury Daily

The digital nature of social media has propelled both auctions and ecommerce sales by enhancing Christie's traditional business model across product categories. With more than 20 million visitors exploring the auctioneer's Web site last year to learn, research, discover and be inspired, a dialogue has been more easily established and maintained online.

"Half of all Christie's bids last year were facilitated digitally," said Brian Shaw, vice president and director of ebusiness at [Christie's](#), New York.

"So although we have several sales rooms where we're conducting these great auction experiences, even in the room we've got people on the phone, but then beyond that we've got people logging-in and submitting live streaming bids, and that's happening at a pretty

high volume now,” he said.

“Over 740,000 people engaged in the online auctions in 2013, and two-thirds were new to Christie’s. This is unlocking a whole level of access and an entry point for people that couldn’t do this before.”

Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2014 was organized by Luxury Daily

An online journey

People who view artwork or historical objects on Christie’s ecommerce site love to share and talk about the pieces on social media. An online introduction allows for an in-person viewing experience that is more meaningful when the client visits the Christie’s showroom.

Communicating online with clients is essential because collecting and buying art is an experiential journey, Mr. Shaw explained. It is because of this that Christie’s aims to create awareness through storytelling.



Christie's Brian Shaw, right and Reginald Brack, left at the Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2013

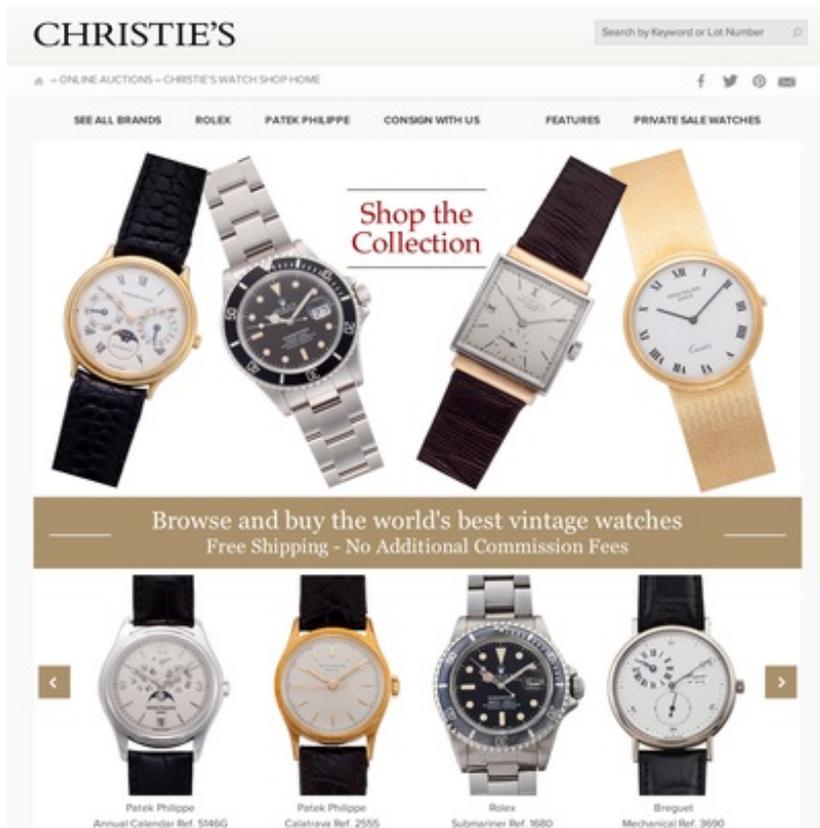
With that in mind, instead of trying to recreate physical, and often theatrical, auctions in the online space, Christie’s marketers work to improve other features. To achieve this Christie’s has allowed consumers to interact how they wish through the use of touchpoints such as 360-degree images, video and currency and language options.

Christie’s Watch Shop was designed in this form to allow potential buyers to engage with the auction house, its agents and above all, browse, learn and buy.

The addition of Christie’s Watch Shop to its online platform is part of the auctioneer’s \$20 million digital and technological investment. Christie’s also sees the Watch Shop as a major step in its ecommerce strategy ([see story](#)).

Christie’s Watch Shop offers rare, vintage and luxury timepieces available for immediate purchase, year round via ecommerce. The auction house notes that the Watch Shop is not meant to diminish timepiece auctions, but rather to complement Christie’s global auction

schedule and its bespoke private sales service ([see story](#)).



Christie's Watch Shop homepage

Reginald Brack, senior vice president and international head of retail, watches, at Christie's, described the Watch Shop as a place where potential buyers don't go just to click and buy, but to really learn about the timepieces available.

Education is at the center of Christie's Watch Shop's notion of storytelling and is a vital aspect of the overall experience. For example, the Watch Shop offers deconstructed breakdowns of specific watch types and offers detailed notes regarding individual models.

Essentially, Mr. Brack said that when Christie's finds a "cool" watch, the team does not want to just sell the piece. Instead, Christie's wants a platform to explain how different and special that specific timepiece is and how it would make the potential buyer feel.

Also, Christie's Watch Shop is a way for the auction house to engage clients and help them learn about watches, which is a large aspect of the purchase process. By humanizing the online experience, through educational content and personal interaction, either over email or on the phone, Christie's has made purchasing vintage watches accessible for novice and established collectors.

Picture time

To bring Christie's Watch Shop's passion for vintage, rare and luxury timepieces to life, social media has been a valuable tool. With Instagram being touted as the most useful, Mr. Brack even encourages browsers and buyers alike to follow his personal account because "[looking at watches] never gets old or repetitive" for enthusiasts.



Reginald Brack's Instagram account

L2 agrees and has made the case that Instagram is beginning to outstrip veteran platforms because of its proliferating and attractive user base, high engagement levels and ecommerce conducive format.

Visual commerce company Olapic collaborated on L2's social media report with insights, such as user-generated images presented on brand Web sites increase conversion by 5 to 7 percent and boost average order value by 2 percent ([see story](#)).

Presenting affluent consumers with attractive imagery can result in higher conversion rates, especially if an item has been curated for discerning tastes.

“For us watch nerds and watch collectors, Instagram has become such a useful and powerful tool,” Mr. Brack said. “We really don't ever get tired of looking at watches online.

“We're always posting pictures, examining dials, but for sure, [Instagram interactions] has continued to be a nice surprise,” he said.

Final Take

Jen King, lead reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

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