IN-STORE

Barneys begins selling exclusive Opening Ceremony, Intel smart bracelet

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Barneys, Intel and Opening Ceremony smart bracelet

By NANCY BUCKLEY

Department store chain Barneys New York is highlighting its forward-looking approach with the release of the Opening Ceremony and Intel wearable smart bracelet online and in select storefronts.

The smart bracelet will connect wearers' text messages and other notifications, and may raise the profile of the technology. Barneys distinguishes itself from peers with exclusive access and may become a go-to place for technology-geared, affluent consumers.

"We are seeing yet another tie up with a luxury fashion house and a tech company much like DVF /Google Glass... something we will see more and more of as time goes by - essentially we are seeing the beginnings of what will be the meteoric rise of wearables," said Maani Safa, VP of innovation & creative at Somo, London. "Globally at the beginning of this year there were 22 million connected devices with the total connected device revenue standing at $200 Billion - by 2020 this is predicted to reach $1.2 Trillion."

Mr. Safa is not affiliated with Barneys, Intel or Opening Ceremony, but agreed to comment

as an industry expert.

Barneys, Intel and Opening Ceremony were unable to comment by press deadline.

Technology exclusive
In January it was announced that Barneys New York would collaborate with Opening Ceremony, the Council of Fashion Designers of America and Intel on wearable technology pieces (see story).

My Intelligent Communication Accessory, or MICA, has the capabilities to connect consumers to access texts, Yelp, Gmail notifications, Facebook events and Google Calendar alerts. For each connection a notification is sent to the wearer's wrist.

Smart bracelets

Consumers will have access to texts and emails from the individuals they dub as an important contact in Gmail. Users can dismiss notifications from the device or respond with customizable quick replies.

A service powered by Intel and TomTom will offer a personal concierge to users that adjusts based on location and provides access to Yelp searches to find nearby hotspots.

The bracelet is finished in 18-karat gold coating with a sapphire glass touch screen display. There are several options such as black or white water snake skin, pearls from China, Lapis stones from Madagascar, tiger's eye from South Africa and obsidian from Russia.

"When it comes to wearables on the wrist, historically, we've had two camps – "watches" which all tried to slap a phone on your wrist (completely wrong use case) or they were overly simplistic, poorly designed plastic bands the best being the Jawbone up24 (which still misses the mark)," Mr. Safa said. "We have seen Android wear begin to change that with watches like the MOTO 360, however none have nailed the "fashion" aspect of it perfectly yet."

Smart bracelets at Barneys

A two year AT&T service plan is provided in the price of the bracelet by Intel.

In a branded statement Humberto Leon, co-founder and creative director of Opening Ceremony said, "Today's modern woman maintains selectivity and exclusivity when choosing accessories, and MICA embodies a beautifully unique statement piece. The wearable space is an exciting, rapidly expanding category and it has been a thrill to be involved in the convergence of fashion and technology through this collaboration with Intel."

The bracelet will be sold in select Barneys stores, online on Barneys' Web site and at Opening Ceremony stores in New York and Los Angeles, as well as Opening Ceremony's Web site.

VIP individuals
Exclusive experiences allow consumers to be part of a VIP opportunity and give retailers a chance to drive traffic to a specific location.

For instance, Chinese department store chain Lane Crawford teamed up with French

fashion house Chloé for an exclusive collection.

The Pink Wardrobe, which launched in-stores and online Nov. 13, modernizes the label's classic "Chloé dusky pink." Rather than just having Chloé designer Claire Waight Keller create the pieces for the retailer, Lane Crawford worked hand in hand with her to develop the looks, picking styles, colors and fabrics together (see story).

Also, Swiss watchmaker Hublot gave enthusiasts a reason to visit its boutiques rather than a retailer by creating exclusive in-store timepieces.

Given the notion that many watch enthusiasts are also avid collectors, Hublot introduced a series of watches available only in its boutiques. By doing so, Hublot will likely increase the foot traffic in its 71 direct-operated boutiques around the world as consumers stop in to check out the exclusive watch collection (see story).

These VIP type devices, however, must be fashionable, must fit the brand, and must fit the consumer.

"When something is worn on the body, e.g. a wearable device, it spends most of its life in a dormant state, simply adorning the body," Mr. Safa said. "This means that the product spends most of its life as a fashion accessory rather than a "tech product", and every single device to date (Pebble, LG smart watch, Samsung, Fitbit etc) looks awful.

"However we are entering an age where wearables are being woven into fashion accessories with luxury brands," he said. "The MICA being a prime example of this. Where the MICA differs from other "wearbles" is that it comes with its own sim card/connection - essentially acting as a separate device aimed at "women on the go".

"The product works independently of the users smartphone via AT&T's 3G network (2 year connection worked into the price) - although Intel and Opening Ceremony say their research shows this is exactly what women on the go are after, the idea of managing two completely separate numbers doesn't seem like something that many would want."

Final Take
Nancy Buckley, an editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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