

COMMERCE

Patek Philippe interviews prospective customers for exclusive watch

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Patek Philippe's Grandmaster Chime watch

By KAYSORIN

Swiss watchmaker Patek Philippe is celebrating its 175th anniversary with the creation of one of the most complex and expensive watches in the world.

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The watch will be known as the Grandmaster Chime, and only seven of them will be made. Prospective consumers must interview with the chairman of the brand, Thierry Stern, to purchase one of the six available watches, while the seventh will be kept by the brand to be displayed at the Patek Philippe museum in Geneva.

"The price is a function of all the man hours it took to make this piece, the impressive functions it performs, the exclusivity of being a limited edition and what the piece says about its owner," said Ron Kurtz, president of the [American Affluence Research Center](#), Atlanta.

"An expensive item like this can produce several benefits for the brand. It reinforces the brand's image for extraordinary craftsmanship, attracts great media coverage, provides content for various forms of communication to clients and followers, makes owners of other Patek Philippe pieces proud and creates a halo for less expensive Patek Philippe

pieces, etc."

Mr. Kurtz is not affiliated with Patek Philippe, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Patek Philippe was unable to respond directly.

Watch out

Not only is the Grandmaster Chime one of the most expensive watches ever created, it is also one of the most complex. The watch includes 20 complications, or features, that allow the user to do a number of things.



The watch is made of gold and inlaid with gemstones

While the price is unusual, it is a result of the incredible amount of effort that went into creating the timepiece. It took eight years and 100,000 hours to develop the watch with many of those hours focused on perfecting the movement.

In addition to the effort, the Grandmaster Chime is also made of the choicest materials. It is 18-karat rose gold with hand-stitched alligator straps and contains 214 parts and 1,366 individual components.



The swivel case allows the watch to rotate

Impressively, designers created a swivel case that allows the watch to be rotated so that it can be worn with either side facing up. Both sides are functional with one showing the time and the other showing a calendar with a four-digit year display that is instantly

updated.

"When a product loses its function, it becomes art," said Al Ries, founder and chairman of [Ries & Ries](#), a Roswell, GA-based marketing strategy consultancy. "Thanks to photography, painting has lost its function, so now it's considered art.

"And the price of art has no relationship to its function. It all depends on its scarcity and the amount of publicity it has received.

"Thanks to the smartphone, watches have lost their function and have become art. High-end watches are almost universally bought by collectors in the same way that high-end art is bought by collectors.

"Thanks to the brand name (Patek Philippe) and the limited quantity (seven pieces), I would expect the Grandmaster Chimes to sell out," Mr. Ries said.

Mr. Stern, the chairman of Patek Philippe, will be conducting interviews with prospective consumers to determine if they are eligible to purchase the Grandmaster Chime. In an interview with CNBC, Mr. Stern said, "I would like to chat with the client and make sure he's a watch lover and make sure he's going to enjoy the watch for many years."



The watch shows the time, date and lunar cycle

By announcing that Mr. Stern will be conducting interviews, the brand will likely inspire increased interest and desire for the product. In the same way that many luxury brands use scarcity to promote their products, Patek Philippe is showing that the Grandmaster Chime is not for any average person.

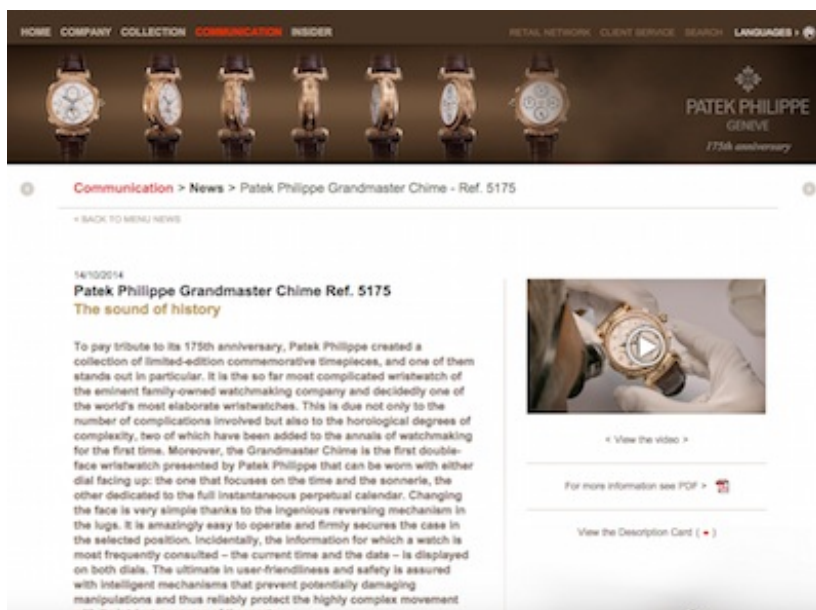
This element of competition will certainly make some consumers desire the watch even more. A potential downside of producing so little could be not selling as many items, however since the Grandmaster Chime takes so much effort to make, it is unlikely that the brand would ever be able to produce them on a large scale.



The alligator strap is stitched by hand

Focusing on the watch's rarity and the difficulty of procuring one is an unusual marketing strategy, but one that should prove successful for the brand. In addition to spurring interest, it will also lead to increased publicity, which will help the brand in promoting other products.

The watchmaker shared links to articles about the Grandmaster Chime on its Facebook to ensure that consumers are aware of the new timepiece and what is required to purchase one.



The brand has extensive information about the watch on its Web site

Timely fashion

In addition to speaking about the required interview, Patek Philippe has chosen to advertise the Grandmaster Chime in other, more conventional ways. The Swiss watchmaker extended the impact of its 175th anniversary celebration with an ad on Departures' mobile and desktop Web sites.

Both ads featured mostly text hinting at the brand's Grandmaster Chime timepiece, but the mobile effort did not mention the watch by name, requiring the viewer to click through to find out more. For the affluent consumers reading Departures, haute horology may have

still been top of mind following the recent trade show SIHH ([see story](#)).

The incredible Grandmaster Chime is an excellent way for the brand to celebrate its anniversary, but it is not the only thing that the brand will do. The Swiss timepiece maker will host a London exhibit May 27 until June 7 to give horologists a rare look inside the family-owned watch brand.

Patek Philippe will present the Watch Art Patek Philippe Grand Exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery. Free of cost, the exhibit will give Patek a transparent platform to share its heritage with consumers and collectors alike ([see story](#)).

The Grandmaster Chime is an excellent way for the brand to celebrate its anniversary. The interview process only makes it more unique.

"I think the interviews will help sell the watches," Mr. Ries said. "If you are spending \$2.5 million for a watch, you might also like to tell friends about your visit with the chairman of Patek Phillippe."

Final Take

Kay Sorin, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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