

COMMERCE

## Smartwatch debate has strapped timepieces back on wearers' wrists

June 18, 2015



*Apple's Apple Watch Edition*

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By JEN KING

NEW YORK – Panelists during the Watch Collectors' Roundtable discussion agreed that the introduction of the smartwatch, though originally daunting, may be the best thing to happen to the traditional Swiss watch industry since the quartz.

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Held on June 16 at the Aaron Faber Gallery, the "Will smartwatches disrupt the Swiss watch industry" panel debated whether or not the smartwatch will have lasting impact with different perspectives from timepiece sellers, collectors and manufacturers to proponents of wearable technology. Although not agreeing on all fronts, the panelists expressed a sense of gratitude toward Apple, and others in the tech space, for putting traditional watches back into the conversation.

"I cannot even count how many hours of debate [smartwatches have] sparked in our offices, with our members and prospects," said Randy Brandoff, CEO and founder of [Eleven James](#), New York.

"No matter what one thinks about the technology of today, and where one thinks it's going in the future, if you're a lover of wristwatches, mechanical or otherwise, I think the

aggregate takeaway is that this is a good thing," he said. "More than anytime I can remember everyone I know has sparked up a conversation about watches, what this means, where are they going and how useful are they."

Mr. Brandoff acted as the moderator for the panel discussion.

### Ticking talk

The panel discussion delved into the fundamental issues and questions surrounding the wearable category and how, if at all, the technology will affect traditional Swiss watch brands.

Each panelist said that mechanical timepieces have been worn as a way to distinguish someone from a crowd, but Apple Watch, and others like it, will become commonplace with only the high-end model, the Edition, being seen as unique.

But, the wearable model is not as practical or as sound of an investment as a mechanical watch because the technology within will become outdated. In comparison, the technology in a timepiece has gone relatively unchanged for hundreds of years, resulting in a time-tested science that has yet to become obsolete.

The general consensus among the participants was that watches, smart or otherwise, have placed wearables on the wrists of consumers who otherwise would not have considered a timepiece. This consumer sector is made mostly of millennial consumers who have grown up in a virtual era where timekeeping is predominantly done by mobile and smartphones.



### *Range of Apple Watches*

Comparably, the introduction of quartz timepieces in the 1970s had a similar outcome with consumers gravitating toward the new technology and away from traditional mechanical watches. As with in the past, consumer sentiment changed as the first wave of interested wearers matured and returned focus to tradition, but not without testing the technologically advanced waters first.

Also, the panelists felt that the disposable nature of the smartwatch also plays into the quartz comparisons. The quartz watch went from cutting edge technology to available as a free prize at the bottom of a cereal box, thus making the innovation diluted.

Just as with a smartphone, the smartwatch will be void of emotional ties while traditional

timepieces can have profound meaning for wearers because they can mark a personal milestone or be passed down along generations.

"I think the whole thing is a bit of an evolution right now," said Jason Alan Snyder, chief technology officer of [Momentum Worldwide](#), New York. "Horology as the science of measuring time really has nothing to do with wearables."

"Wearables are fundamentally an extension of a smartphone at this time," he said. "But, really beyond that it's a small visual signatures of what's happening on your smartphone right now."

"I think that the social capital derived from wearing a fine Swiss timepiece is very different than social capital derived from wearing a smartwatch. I think those two things may converge at some point in the future, but for right now it's the difference between luxury and utility, and they're very different ideas."

### Tech as craftsmanship

For the luxury industry, whether it is timepieces or leather goods, the panelists noted that longevity propels the industry through style, and it is that combination that results in consumer desire.

Additionally, luxury goods are described as made by the hands of skilled artisans, but Sir Jonathan Ive of Apple argued at the Condé Nast International Luxury Conference April 22 that all devices, even those in the technology space, have handcrafted elements.

Whether the Apple Watch will prove disruptive to the traditional watch industry has yet to be fully determined, but the degree of quality behind Apple's first wearable technology is clear ([see story](#)). Apple extensively researched the materials for the watch, especially its gold components, and feels that it is a false assumption to assume those in the technology space do not dedicate the same sense of quality to products as traditional luxury houses ([see story](#)).

Regardless, mechanical watchmakers have melded traditional horology with technological innovations ranging from synced mobile applications, strapped adaptations and fully connected timepieces.

For example, Swiss watchmaker Breitling is taking the smartwatch concept to new heights with its flight-ready B55 Connected timepiece.

Smartwatches are often synced to a smartphone application that tracks the wearer's physical activity and sends push notifications ([see story](#)). Breitling has taken the opposite approach by having the smartphone service the B55 Connected chronograph to enhance functionality and conviviality ([see story](#)).



*Breitling's B55 Connected app*

Also, LVMH-owned Tag Heuer announced its creative partnership between its manufacturer, Google and Intel at Baselworld 2015.

The partnership signifies a new era of collaboration between Swiss watchmakers and Silicon Valley to escalate the expertise of each brand whether it be watchmaking, software or hardware. From the first utterance of wearables, many horologists agreed that collaborative efforts between tradition and technology would yield competitive results ([see story](#)).

Since watches are statement pieces of movements and mechanisms, sparking innovation aligns with the heritage of horology and is worth exploring. But, as it stands today the Swiss watch industry will prevail, even becoming more collectable due to wearables.

"I think the category will grow because of Apple's new entry into the category," said Milton Pedraza, CEO and founder of [The Luxury Institute](#), New York.

"The Apple Watch will evolve into something more compelling, today it's not," he said. "I don't think we have anything to worry about, however I terms of the luxury Swiss watch

industry not only prevailing but thriving as a result."

Final Take

*Jen King, lead reporter on Luxury Daily, New York*

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