

MULTICHANNEL

Offline trumps online when establishing a brand's name

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Deepsea Rolex

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

LONDON Despite the emphasis on digital, traditional marketing still has its place in the luxury world, according to an executive from Watchfinder & Co. at Luxury Interactive Europe on Oct. 28.

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Watchfinder deals in second-hand watches and has found that physical stores have improved the credibility of the venture. Although digital marketing is the focus of many brands' efforts, focusing offline may establish a name and lay the groundwork for future success.

"If people know the store is there and it's relatively convenient, it's a huge credibility factor," said Lloyd Amsdon, founder and brand director of [Watchfinder](#). "It lifts the brand, it differentiates me from everybody else out there the eBays and the like.

"The impact of offline should never be underestimated and it's our belief that you'll never have a pure player on this bus," he said. "With the exception of Net-A-Porter, we don't think there is ever going to be a significant retailer who does not have a store presence."

Building from scratch

Dealing in pre-owned luxury goods has a number of significant differences from selling them first-hand. Unlike when buying a watch from Cartier, Omega, Rolex or any other retailer watches or otherwise the purchase of a second-hand product is desirable based on value that has come off of the item. If the watch has retained too much of its value, the consumer will simply buy directly from the brand.



Watchfinder presentation at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015

As a result, Watchfinder has taken a number of steps to prove its credibility. In addition to establishing bricks-and-mortar stores, a significant percentage of its employees are technicians and the service center is certified by almost all of the major watch brands.

By taking steps to assert reliability through certified service centers, physical stores and a sizable stock, the company has seen visible growth.

"You can't just have an ecommerce site, you need to put out editorial, you need to tell people why they should consider second hand," Mr. Amsdon said.



Cartier Ballon Bleu

Sometimes that means putting an offline experience online. Mr. Amsdon talked about demonstrations in which technicians would take apart and put together or repair a watch for consumers or events Watchfinder would host. Such strategies, while effective, are limited in reach.

Accordingly, Watchfinder released a video that is accessible to everyone to replicate that experience. The video has now garnered around 3 million views, more than the videos of many of the brands themselves.

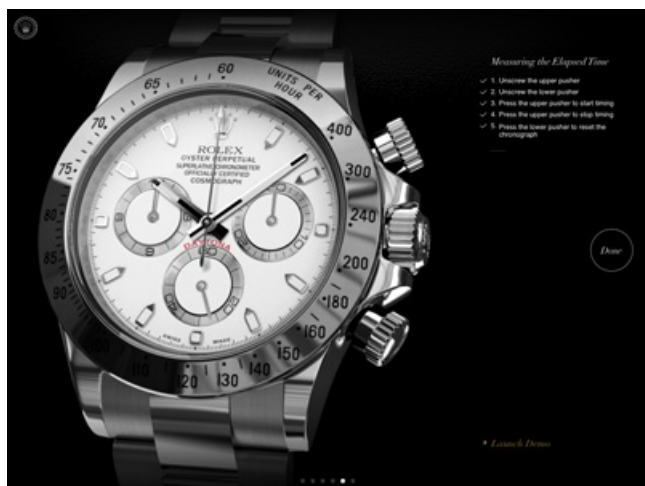
What do these viewing numbers mean? Watchfinder has found its niche; each month, "Watchfinder" is searched on Google more often than many brands. While this does not include brands such as Rolex, Mr. Amsdon is hopeful that's the next step.

Rolex Submariner Watchmaking Demonstration | Watchfinder & Co.

Perhaps because Watchfinder is not building on the kind of heritage and history of globally recognized brands, it has needed to win over consumers in its own way, focusing on the physical world first to justify the digital world.

While those brands may be looking for ways to integrate operations into the digital sphere, it is easy to forget that

each one is building on decades, even centuries of work that have positioned it as a leader within the industry.



Rolex Daytona app 6

That positioning and the innate trust it inspires means that consumers want the convenience offered by mobile and digital commerce. For Watchfinder, digital is a tool in building that trust.

Secondhand news

There is a market for second-hand goods in other sectors as well.

French luxury resale Web site Vestiaire Collective is offering a new retail service focusing on consumers' shopping misconnections.

Using a take on Craigslist's Missed Connections section that lets users share stories of missed opportunities, romantic and otherwise, in hopes of contacting that individual, Vestiaire Collective's limited-time service helps consumers find a luxury good that they were unable to purchase when it was originally in season. "The One That Got Away" is a new six-week feature that will help Vestiaire Collective members search for rare luxury goods through its resale community ([see story](#)).

Because of its unique positioning, Watchfinder, as with Net-A-Porter, is likely an exception that proves the rule.

Affluent consumers have shown their interest in buying goods online, but many luxury brands have been hesitant to embrace ecommerce as part of their retail strategy.

Chanel recently dip its toe into ecommerce through a three-week fine jewelry capsule on Net-A-Porter, but the brand currently limits its direct operated ecommerce to cosmetics. Even with the possibilities through ecommerce from a sales perspective, how can luxury brands decide if selling online is right for them ([see story](#))?

For Watchfinder, that authenticity must be reflected on every level, including how people find it.

"For me personally, I'm very weary of businesses that rely too heavily on paid traffic," Mr. Amsdon said. "I've seen lots of start-ups burn who were 70 to 80 percent paid traffic."

Final Take

Forrest Cardamenis, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily