

TELEVISION

Sotheby's asks auto enthusiasts to change the channel to "disruptive" auction

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1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL "Sportabteilung" Gullwing.

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

International auctioneer Sotheby's is "disrupting" the auction industry by turning to a new channel.

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On Dec. 10, the Sotheby's Apple TV app was launched with the "Driven by Disruption: New York City" automotive sale. Sotheby's year has been defined in part by initiatives that give it a larger online presence.

"Apple TV provides a nice mix of video on demand capabilities as well as the ability to surface live events, and that's what Sotheby's is about," said Josh Pullan, director of ecommerce at **Sotheby's**. "We have tons of video on demand content that we use to support our stores and tell stories.

"This is how we're starting, with our car auction, which is basically just a great event to showcase the live nature of the event to the wider audience," he said. It's about being in many places for our clients and for new clients who want to learn more about the auction business."

Change the channel

The new Apple TV differs from the old model in that it allows for the development and selection of third party applications. Showing that its centuries-old history is not keeping it in the past, Sotheby's has already taken up real estate on the new platform.

Users in 80 countries were able to tune into Driven By Disruption, during which 31 automobiles "exemplifying the extremes of motoring history," were sold. The vehicles included a 1956 Ferrari 290 MM by Scaglietti, a 1962 Aston Martin DB4GT Zagato and a 1955 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL "Sportabteilung" Gullwing.



1956 Ferrari 290 MM by Scaglietti

In the future, video content will include five channels, including HD streams of other auctions, including those in the art world, on "Auction Room." The other channels are Artists, Legendary Auctions, Luxury Goods and Our Experts.

"Artists" includes videos about particularly artists, helping viewers to understand and appreciate the artwork. "Legendary Auctions" will contain details of previous Sotheby's auctions, particularly those that included a particularly memorable sale. "Luxury Goods" videos will take a closer look at jewelry, watches, wine, cars and design, while "Our Experts" features Sotheby's employees recalling memorable moments.

Apple TV is a particularly popular platform amongst cord cutters, those who make use of platforms such as Hulu Apple TV in lieu of a cable subscription. Cord cutters tend to be young and affluent, so an Apple TV app could help Sotheby's reach an audience that has the means to build a lasting relationship with the auctioneer and its products.

The app fits into Sotheby's larger strategy to become more visible in the digital space. Recently, Sotheby's has collaborated with online auctioneers and turned to live online sales because of the effectiveness the auction mode found on sites like eBay, and also increased editorial output and video production.

"Driven by Disruption: Janis Joplin's Groovy Porsche 356"

So far, the strategy has paid off. Sotheby's had more visitors to its Web site through September 2015 than it did in all of 2014, and online bids, purchases and lots have increased by upwards of 40 percent compared to the same time last year.

"Apple is not an exclusively young user base but what is certain is that it is a premium channel that aligns nicely with the Sotheby's brand," Mr. Pullman said. "I think there's a broader interest in art and luxury products among Apple's consumers and we're able to expose our content to a wider audience."

New kid in town

Sotheby's has made previous efforts this year to establish itself in the automotive sector.

This February, the auction house strengthened its efforts in the automotive sector with a new partnership with a collector car auctioneer.

Sotheby's has acquired a 25 percent stake in RM Auctions, which will be known as RM Sotheby's going forward. High-end automobiles represent a \$2 billion market, providing both parties with strong potential as they prepare for their first joint sale ([see story](#)).

Partnerships are proving to be an effective way for a new online player to gain credibility amongst a new audience.

Sotheby's recently geared up for its high-end watch sale by bid since partnering with online auction site eBay, which took place on June 11.

Last summer, Sotheby's and eBay partnered to develop a digital platform that enables consumers to easily browse artwork, antiques and collectibles. Through the partnership, eBay has granted its 145 million active buyers access to Sotheby's expertise, auction experience, artwork and collectibles while the auction site has made the bidding process easier through its seamless platform and payment solutions ([see story](#)).

Sotheby's will continue to maintain a presence in the automotive sector, but the Apple TV app will soon move beyond.

"We know that the car enthusiast community is really really engaged with the auction format," Mr. Pullan said. "We knew the product is ready to launch and this is a great and engaged consumer group, so let's start with this.

"Going forward we'll use it for marquee, for art, jewelry, watches and its capacity for live viewing, and going forward we'll continue to surface our VOD content there as well."

Final Take

Forrest Cardamenis, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily