

EVENTS/CAUSES

Blancpain ventures south to keep consumers cool

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Blancpain Ocean Commitment Bathyscaphe Chronographe Flyback

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Swiss watchmaker Blancpain is marching into the cold to help illustrate the effects of global warming.

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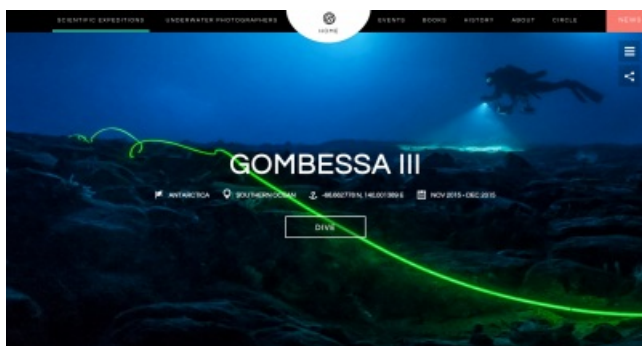
Alongside Luc Jacquet, director of "March of the Penguins," and a team of artists, including photographers Laurent Ballesta and Vincent Munier, the brand has gone to Antarctica to capture images of the damage wrought due to climate change. Environmentalism is perhaps the premier concern among the global population today, and working to fight it showcases Blancpain's brand values and positions it as a leader in key issues of our time.

"The Antarctic expedition is a fitting continuation of Blancpain's naval and aquatic history," said Chuck Mascola, president, Mascola Group, a lifestyle and destination strategic marketing firm located in New Haven, Connecticut. "As a prestigious brand, and a pioneer in its category, partnering with a project that represents the very pinnacle of human exploration is a testament to the brand's exclusivity and quality.

"Additionally, what's great about this initiative is that Blancpain capitalizes on the fact that high net worth consumers want to feel like they're buying into an experience and a lifestyle, rather than the product itself," he said.

March of the jewelers

The journey, Gombessa III, follows in the footsteps of previous expeditions that uncovered information about the West Indian Ocean coelacanth fish and studied marbled groupers in a small section of the Tuamotu Archipelago, French Polynesia. Gombessa III photographers will go below Antarctic ice to look for signs of life.



Gombessa III photo

Dives that will comprise Gombessa III have not been undertaken in the past, meaning they will be the first natural images of Antarctica's deep-sea ecosystems. An inventory of deep-sea fauna will be created and studied in relation to global warming, with all photos and data being shared with researchers.

Consumers can follow the expedition, which is the underwater element of Mr. Jacquet's overarching Wild-Touch Expeditions Antarctica project, on a [Web site](#) bearing Blancpain's name. The Web site includes a vlog that will help give rise to ARTE-produced documentaries, an IMAX film by Mr. Jacquet, museum exhibitions and books for children and adults alike.



Blancpain expedition Web site

In addition, the site features an interactive menu that lets users explore various points of geographic, historical or photographic interest.

"A daily vlog is a smart match for this project, and the beautiful, interactive website does the expedition and the brand justice," Mr. Mascola said. "Giving visitors a rare glimpse into one of the most remote parts of the globe is a great way to connect consumers to both the cause and the brand that makes it possible."

To help raise awareness, Blancpain is asking its followers to retweet a message from @Wild_Touch and add #LiveAntarctica. Those who do will have their message and Twitter handle displayed on the side of France's National Library underneath pictures by Mr. Ballesta and Mr. Munier.

Featuring user-generated content is a popular way to appeal to consumers. Doing so helps consumers feel like they have a hand in shaping the brand or, in cases such as this, helping to raise awareness and initiate change for an important cause.



Blancpain Pristine Seas

Blancpain's products are not being pushed in conjunction with the campaign, meaning all the brand has to gain is an increased awareness by having its name attached. However, young consumers are influenced significantly by a brand's values, and by attaching itself to a cause without looking to gain, Blancpain positions itself as a brand with a genuine concern for the environment rather than one co-opting a cause for its own gain or good publicity.

Down south

Antarctic voyages have recently had popularity with luxury brands in other sectors, albeit for different reasons.

In November, French-Italian apparel label Moncler also went boldly where few have gone before.

The brand is partnering with Italian explorer Michele Pontrandolfo to promote its Grenoble fall/winter 2015-16 collection, which Mr. Pontrandolfo will wear for his solo exploration of the South Pole. The partnership is a subtle

way for Moncler to promote its own products and align itself with impressive accomplishments ([see story](#)).

For others, the association with polar treks embodies the particular values on which a brand prides itself.

For example, in February 2014, British automaker Jaguar Land Rover demonstrated its ability to find brand-appropriate ambassadors.

British explorers Ben Saunders and Tarka L'Herpiniere trekked 1,795 miles over 105 days in Antarctica to achieve the longest man-haul polar expedition in history. Unlike many brand ambassadors, Mr. Saunders has truly embodied the values that Land Rover has tried to exude since his invitation in 2008 ([see story](#)).

However, reaching out too obviously to a large audience could dilute the brand.

"Out of home and social media are often the wrong channels for luxury brands, and Blancpain would likely see greater benefit by investing its efforts in more targeted media," Mr. Mascola. "As we emphasize to our luxury clients, the general public, only a small percentage of which is capable of affording or appreciating the product, is not the target audience.

"The illusion of accessibility that large scale efforts like this one create can significantly dilute the value and exclusivity of the brand."

Final Take

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