

ADVERTISING

Mercedes-Benz joins “StyleMakers” with sponsored content

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Mercedes A-Class

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

German automaker Mercedes-Benz is fine-tuning its image by examining "Passion, Curiosity, Necessity" through sponsored content.

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The brand helped produce a series of videos with Variety and Women's Wear Daily featuring celebrities, influencers and creators in the world of fashion, in which the subjects discuss glamour, celebrity, success and the challenges of being a woman in the industry. Although the content does not push Mercedes' vehicles, it helps associate the brand with positive values that could stick with readers further down the road.

"Variety and WWD represent best in class journalism in their respective fields, bringing an authenticity and expertise to the production of this content initiative that is representative of our commitment to 'the best or nothing' in all pursuits," said Stephanie Zimmer, department manager, brand experience marketing at [Mercedes-Benz](#).

Leaning in

The campaign was executed in conjunction with Variety and Women's Wear Daily, where the content is [hosted](#), at the publications' StyleMakers event. Kerry Washington, Freida Pinto, Viola Davis and Katie Holmes are among the numerous celebrities featured in the videos.

Leaning In: How Kerry Washington, Viola Davis and Freida Pinto Trust Collaborators

There are five videos in total. In the first one, actresses Ms. Washington, Ms. Pinto and Ms. Davis discuss the nature of collaboration and how to foster trust.

In the second, the same three actresses discuss decision-making and when they know they should agree to a project. "Being willing to say yes' to new adventures is really important," Ms. Washington says in the video.

In the third, Ms. Washington, Ms. Pinto and makeup artist Lisa Eldridge discuss the difficulties and obstacles they faced as women in the workplace.

Women Overcoming Obstacles: How Kerry Washington, Freida Pinto and Lisa Eldridge Approach Challenges

The fourth video focuses on the rise of celebrity glamour on the west coast. It includes a brief conversation with Smashbox Studios co-founder and photographer Davis Factor and glamour photographer Matthew Rolston.

For the final video, Mr. Rolston talks about the nature of talent and whether it is something people are born with or if it can be learned. He also look at how to get a start, including the physical transformations pop king Michael Jackson, with whom Mr. Rolston collaborated in 1987, had to make to succeed.

The videos are among the first endeavors Mercedes has made in communicating the ideas and attitudes associated with success and accomplishment. By linking itself to those values through sponsorship, Mercedes could be seen by the consumer as a good choice when it comes time to purchase a vehicle.

"Mercedes-Benz does not just look to align with celebrities, the brand is passionate about working with influential artists who are truly dedicated to their crafts," Ms. Zimmer said. "Our Stylemakers represent a broad spectrum of talented people, working tirelessly to define the look of an industry that reaches far beyond our screens and into everyday life."

Michael Jackson's Swagger: Matthew Rolston on why the Pop King Changed his Look

Given the competitive nature of the automobile industry, it is not enough to simply advertise product. Instead, automakers must focus on associating their brand with particular ideas and values that will appeal to consumers. Offering a peek at the "passion, curiosity, necessity" of talent provides insight and creates associations that may create that connection in the consumer's mind.

To extend their reach, the videos are also being promoted on social media with both organic and paid placement.

"Social media's amplification allows us to ensure the content reaches the fans of our Stylemakers, on the platforms that they want to engage with their favorite influencers," Ms. Zimmer said.

Going native

This is not the first time that Mercedes has neglected advertising products to instead create values and lifestyles around the brand.

In November, Mercedes asked consumers to join it on an African safari.

Issue 3/2015 of Mercedes-Benz Classic Magazine, the automaker's editorial and lifestyle outlet since 2002, features Carel Roux venturing through South Africa in a restored 1974 Unimog U 406. Connecting the brand with diverse lifestyles through heritage helps to sell Mercedes as a lifestyle rather than simply a product and may appeal to new consumers ([see story](#)).

Competitors have also turned to sponsored content with the hopes of selling a lifestyle image to consumers.

For example, in August fellow German automaker BMW advertised and sponsored content on men's magazine Esquire's mobile site to promote its brand and 6 Class Series.

While some advertisements appeared to promote offers on the new BMW 6 Class series and landed on BMW's homepage, others allowed users to scroll through several images of BMW cars and redirected to another page on Esquire featuring BMW's sponsored content. The strategy promoted a partnership between Esquire and BMW and also allowed readers to discover BMW's 6 Class Series on their own ([see story](#)).

"Mercedes-Benz's brand values are consistent with our Stylemakers commitments to excellence, standing for a purpose, going against the grain and being a unique individual," Ms. Zimmer said. "Creativity in design can be achieved in film & tv, on the red carpet, in the drive way and everywhere else on the road of life."

Final Take

Forrest Cardamenis, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York