

INTERNET

William Henry undercuts masculinity with viral video

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William Henry sterling silver snake pendant

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Male-focused accessories maker William Henry is hoping to broaden its market by asking what #ARealManIs.

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In a humorous music video, a group of men break down stereotypes of how men are expected to act, implicitly suggesting that men shouldn't be afraid to wear the brand's jewelry. Gender fluidity has penetrated the luxury world, and William Henry's effort is the latest to embrace newfound individuality.

"The main objective of the video is to increase William Henry's brand awareness with younger male audiences," said Matt Conable, founder and chief designer of **William Henry**. "By highlighting and promoting a debate about the stereotypes that define what's a man,' we are stepping back from our more traditional product-oriented marketing efforts, and focusing the attention on William Henry as a lifestyle brand.

"As one of the only luxury brands exclusively dedicated to men, we ask ourselves everyday what #ARealManIs, and while we know that this is a complicated question, we also recognize that there are many stereotypes that are either surpassed or need to be debunked," he said. "We don't know all the answers, but it is well within our brand's mission and vision to ask relevant questions about what defines a man today."

What's a man?

Jewelry, and particularly luxury jewelry, is seen largely as a category exclusively for women. By focusing on men's jewelry, William Henry has to overcome people's prejudices.

However, consumers are generally skeptical about overt product pushes and consider a first-party brand to be less reliable than other sources. By creating a music video that does not explicitly mention William Henry, the brand is spreading its message in a more subtle way that consumers may share with one another.

The music video begins listing a series of activities that men are stereotypically understood to enjoy, from watching sports, drinking from kegs and pumping iron. However, the traits are subverted when "pumping iron" is juxtaposed with "ironing a cashmere sweater," and one man is seen talking about his daughter's day at school while watching sports on TV.

The men also sing about baking birthday cakes and juxtapose the images of a man ripping his shirt open and then sewing the buttons back on. At the end, they conclude that what it means to be a man is "a complicated subject."

At the end of the video, William Henry links to its site and encourages users to share the video with the tag #ARealManIs on social media. The video's humor will make consumers more likely to share it, helping to give the brand visibility.

"What's a Man?"

As no products are advertised, the video works primarily to grant the brand visibility. As the men's jewelry space has fewer players than many other sectors, a memorable campaign that leaves an impression could lead to a significant share of new consumers, who will not be inundated with advertising from competitors.

"With over 50 percent of William Henry's Web traffic coming from mobile (up 50 percent from only three years ago), visual content has become crucial to customer engagement," Mr. Conable said. "Social media is a very democratic' marketing tool: it allows users to easily share a message that is relevant to them; they can also ignore it, or decide to promote it negatively.

"If you consider that William Henry has built its brand by allowing its customers to be protagonists, and express their own personality and tastes, social media is the perfect marketing tool for our brand."

Blurring boundaries

The dismantling of gendered stereotypes is a movement that began far outside of luxury. As decades of cumulative effect and newfound visibility on the Internet have helped the public open up to nontraditional understandings of gender, however, luxury has felt and sought to capitalize on the ripples.

The changes have recently been felt in the fashion sector, where Italian fashion label Gucci became the latest house to alter its runway show format.

Gucci president and CEO Marco Bizzarri announced during his keynote at the International New York Times Luxury Conference on April 5 that the brand will begin showing its men's and women's wear together in a single show per season starting in 2017. Fashion is trying to find a winning format for the runway show, which causes creatives at large houses to stage numerous spectacles a year ([see story](#)).

More recently, Italian apparel and accessories label Valentino has gotten back to basics with a gender-neutral line of classic pieces.

To introduce the collection, named Rockstud Untitled, Valentino creative directors Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pierpaolo Piccioli worked with artist Vanessa Beecroft on a living performance piece. The lines are blurring between men's and women's fashions, opening up opportunities for brands to experiment with new design concepts ([see story](#)).

"As a luxury men's jewelry brand it is important to share the messaging that jewelry is a tool used to add a personal touch to your overall style," Mr. Conable. "It is important to me that the brand retain the aura and feel of an artisan workshop, where every piece is designed and created exclusively in small, limited, often unique editions.

"In addition to the hand workmanship, it is the distinctive character and personality of each piece that truly makes every William Henry creation unique," he said. "We also often work with collectors to create one of a kind pieces, hand crafted to reflect their personalities."