

JEWELRY

SIHH leverages social, hosts public for first time amidst waning watch interest

January 24, 2017



Van Cleef & Arpels' Poetry of Time

By JEN KING

With sales in the luxury watch category continuing to decline, digital marketing has become a catalyst for brand exposure, especially at traditionally closed-door events such as Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie.

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Invite-only watch fair SIHH's audience has been virtually expanded in recent years by participating brands' use of social and digital platforms. While many brands have used social and digital campaigns to accompany SIHH launches, this year marked the trade fair's first open invitation to a watch-loving public on Jan. 20.

"Leveraging social media is critical for luxury watchmakers because they have been slow to keep up with changes in consumer behavior," said Donnie Pacheco, principal at [Clean Channel Consulting, Inc.](#), Seattle.

"Luxury watchmakers ignored the Internet and only in the past few years have started to come around and realize that it is not only here to stay, but that it is an important piece of the customer research and purchase journey," he said. "The majority of luxury watchmakers still do not sell online so leveraging social media is at least a way for them to connect with current customers and reach out to potential customers in an understandable way.

"This is where customers spend their time and the brands need to be there to remind them that they still exist and to build lost excitement for their brands and products."

Attentive audiences

The 2017 edition of SIHH, held annually in Geneva, ran from Jan. 16-20.

Watchmakers with displays included A. Lange & Shne, Audemars Piguet, Baume & Mercier, Cartier, Girard-Perregaux, Greubel Forsey, IWC Schaffhausen, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Montblanc, Panerai, Parmigiani Fleurier, Piaget, Richard Mille, Roger Dubuis, Ulysse Nardin, Vacheron Constantin and Van Cleef & Arpels.

All of the aforementioned brands gathered at SIHH to display their latest innovations and watchmaking savoir-faire in way of timepieces and objet d'arts while exhibition areas told of heritage and touted individual design aesthetics.

Standout efforts seen during SIHH leveraged the usage of social influencers, Facebook Live, Snapchat and

Instagram to generate interest and engagement among those in attendance and watch lovers following along at home.



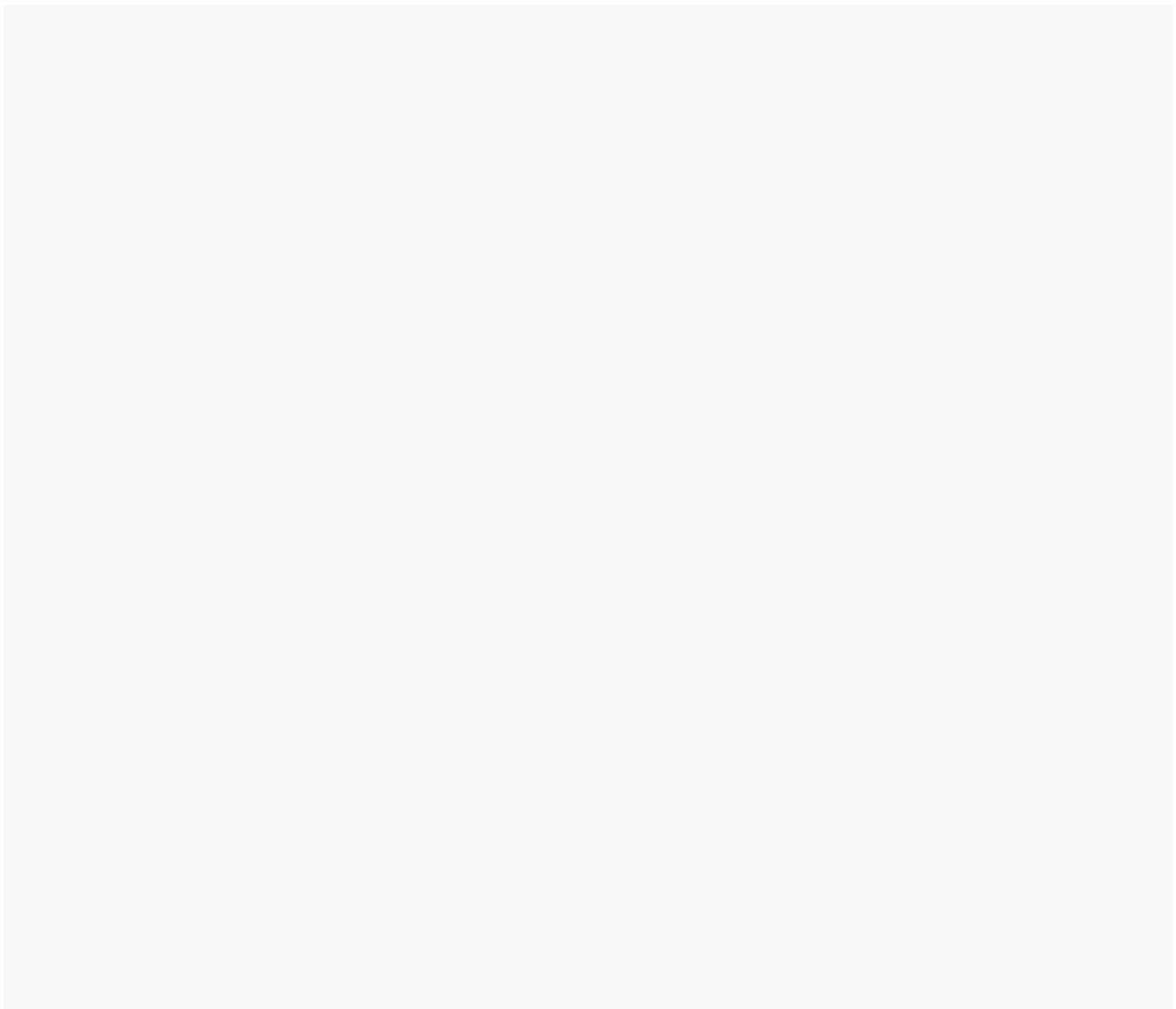
IWC, for instance, introduced its new Da Vinci Collection in the days leading up to SIHH with a social influencer campaign.

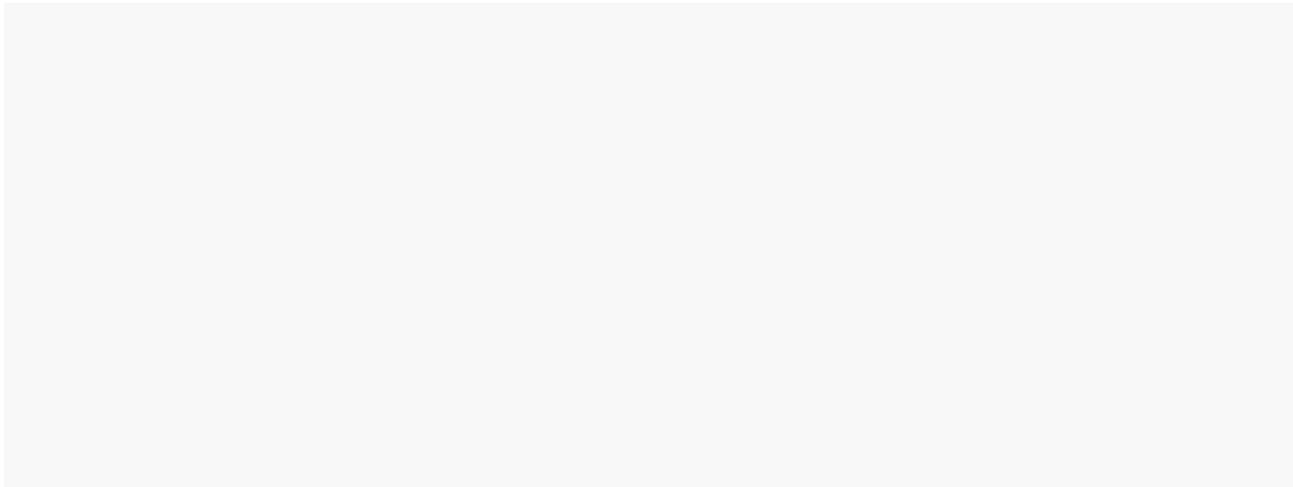
During the weekend before SIHH's opening day, IWC invited female influencers such as Kristina Bazan, Gary Pepper Girl's Nicole Warne, Xenia Tchoumi and supermodel Karolina Kurkova join the brand in Florence, Italy.

The women were photographed in Florence wearing watches from the Da Vinci Collection, a line that offers feminine styles. IWC's #TheCodeofMe was then shared on a dedicated Instagram account with the handle @IWCStyleJournal.

Additional photographs were then shared directly from SIHH with the female influencers as IWC's guests.

IWC also ensured fans around the world felt included by using Facebook Live to stream watch unveilings.





#regram @kristinabazan for the new @IWCDaVinci #thecodeofme #IWCSIHH #SIHH2017 #IWCStyleJournal

A photo posted by IWC Style Journal (@iwcstylejournal) on Jan 16, 2017 at 8:44am PST

Jaeger-LeCoultre took a similar route to ensure that its enthusiasts felt involved in the festivities of SIHH.

On Jan. 16, Jaeger-LeCoultre turned to Snapchat, a platform it uses often for a bevy of brand events, to give followers a sneak peak of the timepieces unveiled at SIHH 2017.

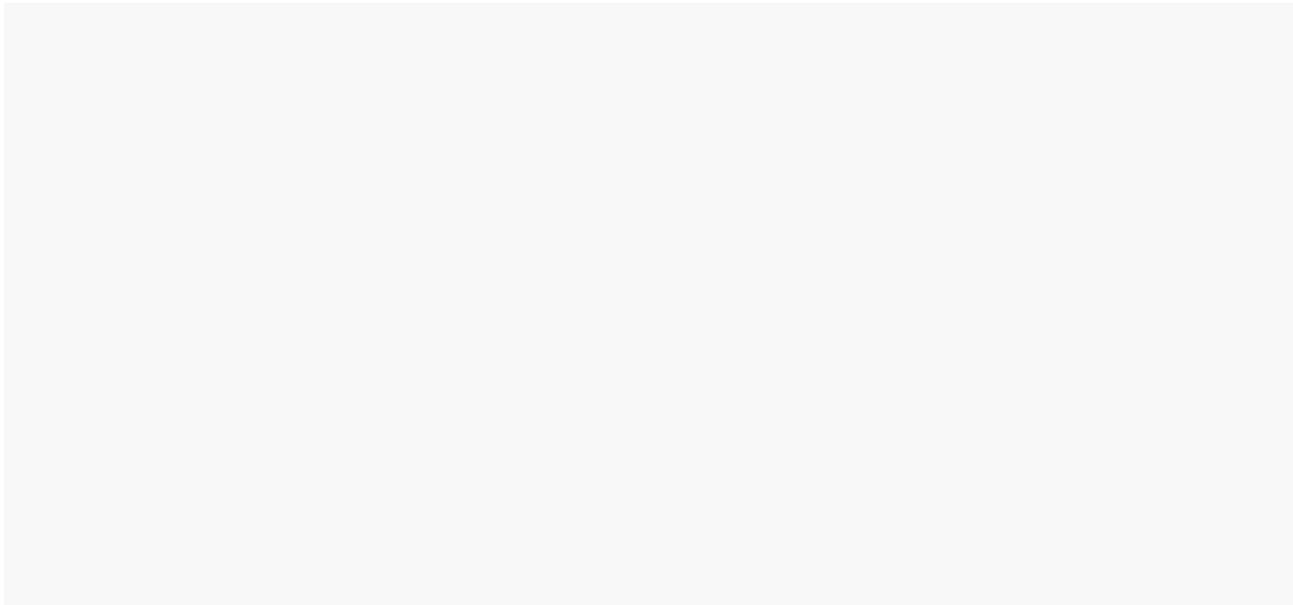
Instead of relying on a mobile phone to capture its Snaps, Jaeger-LeCoultre used Snapchat Spectacles. The newly launched product allows users to create Snaps Stories with the touch of a button found on the connected glasses' frame.

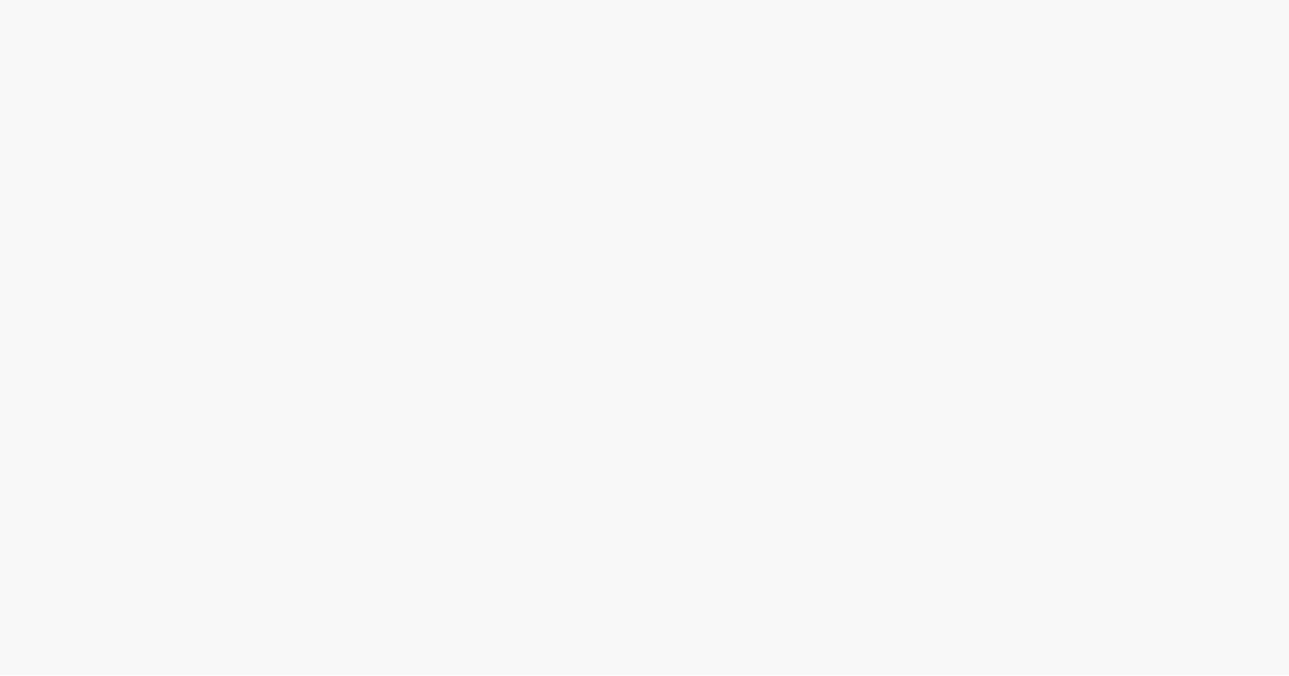
To announce its plans, Jaeger-LeCoultre created a teaser video shared to social media as well as notified consumers via email in the days leading up to Jan. 16.

Instagram has been, by far, the most useful of the social media platforms for brands looking to include a large audience.

Van Cleef & Arpels, for example, used the platform to unveil its latest timepieces and its SIHH theme, "Poetry of Time," through a six-chapter animated narrative. Each vignette was presented as a ballet, a meaningful aspect of Van Cleef & Arpels history, with the performers and scenery becoming the timepiece.

The effort supports both Van Cleef & Arpels' dedication to artistry and its thoughtful use of nature and good luck motifs in its pieces.





Explore the Maison's Poetic Astronomy with Van Cleef & Arpels Midnight Planetarium watch. This Poetic Complication indicates one's lucky day in the universe, while charting the course of the planets. #PoeticComplications
#PoetryofTime

A video posted by Van Cleef & Arpels (@vancleefarpels) on Jan 10, 2017 at 9:08am PST

Open to all

In the nearly 30 years since SIHH's inception, the event has been restricted to attendees invited directly by brand participants and select members of the press.

This year's SIHH, however, was open to the public through ticketing. A limited number of tickets were reserved for the public and available from October.

SIHH likely decided to make one day of the four-day show open to the public due to waning interest in fine horology.

The Swiss watch industry's value of exports declined by 5.6 percent to just under 1.9 billion Swiss francs, or \$1.8 billion at current exchange rates, for the month of November.

The Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry noted that the decline of exports, a trend that has continued for nearly two years, "softened" in November, but the sector is still struggling. In addition to waning interest, the decline in value is being linked to precious metal watches ([see story](#)).

"Selling tickets for the first time is an important step, because BaselWorld has been doing this for years and it is how it generates so much buzz and excitement," Mr. Pacheco said. "Allowing the public to see the product and interact with watchmakers does a couple of things for brands.

"The most obvious is that it allows attendees to post pictures and videos online and generates more buzz and awareness through social media," he said. "The second is it creates the experience and personal connection that is so important to customers and that is lacking with the brands.

"Today's consumer is all about experiences and feeling a personal connection with a brand, and this an important step for luxury watchmakers to foster this relationship. People in attendance can not only post actual footage, but also share their experience with others, creating a much larger reach for luxury watchmakers."