

JEWELRY

## Nicolas Baretzki on Montblanc: "We are aiming to become a serious player in the connected watches market"

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*Nicolas Baretzki is CEO of Montblanc. Image credit: Luxury Society*

By **Lydianne Yap**

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As a storied maker of writing instruments, watches and leather goods, Montblanc has learned to keep up with the times and contemporize its offerings to suit the needs of successive generations of consumers.

In this exclusive interview, **Montblanc** CEO Nicolas Baretzki talks about the manufacturer's push to target millennials and its plans for growth in China. Please read on.

For the last couple of years, Montblanc has been more focused on highlighting its rich heritage and tradition in fine watchmaking. This year, it seems to be presenting itself as a more innovative, forward-thinking and trendy brand. Is this indicative of a new direction the brand is heading towards?

Montblanc has always been a pioneering company, constantly breaking new ground. Today, the spirit of innovation and very forward-thinking, modern direction is stronger than ever, and allows the maison to keep pushing forward.

Fine craftsmanship paired with passion for innovation is our vision of excellence and the maison's foundation and guiding principle that can be seen in all our creations.

A very good example of this forward-thinking approach is when we introduced bronze to our 1858 collection this year. A first for the maison, this resulted in vintage-inspired timepieces that captured the spirit of the past in a modern way.

The 1858 collection reinterprets the famous Minerva chronographs from the 1930s, with distinct designs and exceptional mechanics that traverse time and demonstrates vintage watchmaking at its finest.

Montblanc's new products also seem to be targeting a younger audience, both with its more modern designs and approachable price points. Is this a key segment for Montblanc moving forward?

As a maison that focuses on innovation, we are always keeping a close eye on the latest trend reports, and we are looking more and more into target groups like the millennials.

For these young professionals, it is all about individuality and self-expression. We have a portfolio of products that gives them different ways to express their style, and many of our products offer customizable options such as different straps and even watch faces on our Summit smartwatch.



*Montblanc China site homepage showing watches. Image credit: Montblanc*

Montblanc launched a very aggressive digital marketing campaign in China for the launch of the Summit, with key messages very clearly targeted at millennials. In your opinion, are digital platforms the only way to reach this consumer group today?

Our consumers' digital demands are getting more significant and Montblanc is very forward thinking in this aspect. This is not just displayed through our product range for example, the Augmented Paper or Montblanc Summit but also in how we reach the younger audience with digital campaigns and how we transmit the aspiration and vision of our maison and our creations.

Digital is not the only way to reach the millennials. We are reaching them through our innovative products, through our brand ambassadors who represent all attributes of the maison and also through an experiential retail channel that we are continuously refining and developing.

We are constantly looking to rethink, evolve and explore new methods of doing so, pushing ourselves to think about how we can make the maison more and more relevant in today's world, and appealing to a fast-paced generation of achievers and creative thinkers.

The Summit digital campaign drove great results. Can you tell us more about it?

The Summit launch has been a huge success, and the watch sold out rapidly in many markets.

Chinese customers especially appreciated this high-end smartwatch that served as a digital interpretation of fine watchmaking with its classic and vintage look.

[Montblanc] also recently selected a new brand ambassador for China, Yang Yang. The image he puts forth is very different from that of Montblanc's international ambassador, Hugh Jackman. How do you reconcile the two in terms of embodying the brand's values?

Although they are very different characters, they both represent all attributes of the maison.

Yang Yang, as one of the greatest actors of his generation, is the best example of the New Code of Manhood, being energetic, self-assured and confident in expressing himself.

There are many Montblanc aficionados among the millennials who share the same values as Yang Yang, striving for self-expression and individualization.

Hugh Jackman inspires and entralls audiences worldwide with the quality of his performances. A true visionary that does things differently, he is the perfect embodiment of the maison's unrelenting desire to pioneer with sophisticated, elegant, innovative and high-quality products.

*Montblanc's campaign with Chinese actor and new brand ambassador Yang Yang*

The press conference announcing Yang Yang as the new ambassador was live-streamed. How does it feel to know that a million people were tuning in to the event simultaneously?

It feels great and we are honored that so many people were tuning in to partake in this fantastic event. It was a memorable night for us, and it makes us very proud.

The Star Legacy was also launched at the recent event to present Yang Yang as its ambassador. How do you see Yang Yang helping the brand to develop its image in China and also to reach its target consumers?

Yang Yang never stops chasing the best in every role and every shot, constantly pushing himself to deliver the finest

performance. He has paved his way to becoming a cultural icon and inspires the younger generation, sharing the same values as them. He perfectly embodies the maison's vision of excellence, constantly moving ahead and pushing to the next level.

It has been 20 years since the last launch of a Star watch. What prompted its re-release, with the Star Legacy? Our goal was to reinvent a classic by combining distinctive, sophisticated and timeless design codes. Its 20-year anniversary was the perfect occasion for this.

We reinterpreted our iconic collection by keeping its key elements, but enhancing the level of classical finishing and the sophistication of its design.

The inspiration came from the extraordinary Minerva heritage that dates back to 1858 and the company's pocket watches that were made during the late 19th century and early 20th century.

In your opinion, what are some of the buying patterns and tastes and preferences that are specific to the Chinese? How is Montblanc addressing these specificities in its push for market share in China? China is a very important market for us. It has evolved very rapidly in the past 15 years and clients are now looking for the top level of craftsmanship, quality and designs.

Personalization and a deep understanding of their wish for unique creations will be the key to developing our presence in this market even further.

Chinese customers value fine craftsmanship and demand highest quality.

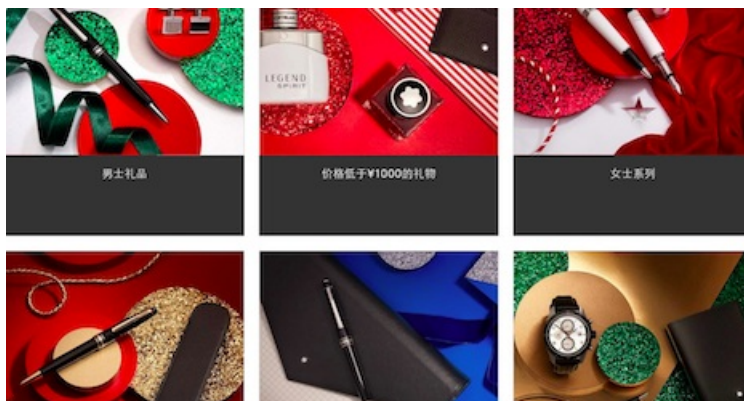
Collections that offer timeless designs paired with true innovation are the real trends here.

Customers are looking for lifetime companions that offer the finest craftsmanship, ultimate performance and impeccable design, and that is exactly what we express in all our creations.

Montblanc launched its own ecommerce platform back in 2011, and now also has its own WeChat store. Has the brand seen a rise in the percentage of revenue generated from online sales in the years since, especially with the growing push for digital?

Montblanc has been in the online business for several years now, and ecommerce has evolved as a legitimate sales channel with substantial share in key markets. We see it as a great opportunity to offer the best solutions for our customers.

As digital technology becomes a central part of life it opens a whole new world in terms of purchasing experience. It is a great opportunity to target younger audiences and digital professionals as well.



Montblanc China Web site with product assortment. Image credit: Montblanc

How do you see the future of ecommerce evolving and what does this mean for Montblanc?

In my opinion, omnichannel is the only answer for our client needs in the future. It has to go beyond ecommerce and should open a real experience and simplification for our customers. Their needs and demands are getting more and more differentiated and this will only increase in the next five years.

As digital technology grows in importance and becomes a central part of life, it opens up a whole new world in terms of purchasing experiences, and this is where we need to continuously adapt to all the changes and circumstances in order to offer the best shopping experience to our clients.

With so many new plans and initiatives underway, where do you hope to see Montblanc in five years? We will keep innovation at the forefront of our maison.

For watches, we are aiming to become a serious player in the connected watches market.

We also want to maintain our value proposition and lead in creating striking, clever complications.

We will continue to leverage our unique history and heritage through communication of the Minerva manufacture, which marks 160 years of watchmaking expertise, next year.

For leather goods and writing instruments, we will continue to innovate exploring new materials with the help of the savoir-faire of our artisans in both manufactures.

*Follow Montblanc into the world of "The Greatest Showman"*

*Lydianne Yap is China editor of **Luxury Society** and marketing and communications director at **DLG China**.  
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