

JEWELRY

How SIHH merged digital and human experiences

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This year's SIHH provided luxury brands with a platform to establish their role in the digital realm while providing attendees with authentic, human experiences, thus affirming its growing influence in the watch industry. Image credit: SIHH

By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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For its 28th edition, the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie (SIHH) in Geneva, Switzerland organized last month by the Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie (FHH) reported that attendance rose by 20 percent from 2017 to almost 20,000 visitors.

With six additional luxury watch brands joining this year's event bringing the total number of exhibitors to 35 it is clear that the high-end watch fair is growing in stature.

This may also be a sign of steady recovery for the luxury watch industry, which has not been in the best shape for the last couple of years. Deloitte reported the first signs of recovery during last year's second quarter, where exports from the Swiss watch industry rose by 3 percent compared to 2016.

The SIHH has certainly proved to be more than just a high-end watch fair. Brands have become increasingly drawn to its approach in creating a space where fans can connect with them both online and offline through digital as well as authentic experiences.

The digital dimension

WatchProSite reported that the SIHH reached 288 million people, and Twitter, Instagram and Weibo accounted for more than 80 percent of conversations.

Guests were consistently encouraged to share content from the exhibition with those following the event online.

Piaget had its own photo booth where guests were given the option to share their pictures instantaneously on social media with an accompanying hashtag, the "#PiagetExperience". "White Box" studios were also set up around the fair to facilitate digital communication channels.

There were several impressive technological innovations occupying each stand including Panerai's virtual reality

room and robotic arms that presented their timepieces, Jaeger-LeCoultre's "On Your Wrist" augmented reality application, and Montblanc's 360-degree virtual reality masks.

Not only did the use of these new-fangled technologies serve to entice a younger audience to the stands, it also made a clear statement that luxury watch brands are looking to affirm their roles in the digital world.



Montblanc's VR masks at SIHH. Image credit: Luxury Society

The human experience

What stood out in parallel to the impressive gadgets on display was the effort to promote human contact throughout the week.

Lavish seating areas and bars were strategically built to enhance networking and conversations between the guests. This created an open and friendly environment.

IWC Schaffhausen's room was particularly welcoming with its New York-themed distillery and "Press Bar" where guests could sit and have a drink after admiring the novel timepieces on display. Entering their stand made one feel like a visitor on a film set.

Many brands also invited watchmakers from their respective manufactures to the fair for live watchmaking demonstrations.

Watch enthusiasts were able to have a sit-down with these professionals and learn about the ins and outs of the trade.

Each brand focused on making their stands as interactive as possible, as seen by the distinct themes, exquisite art pieces and installations.

These initiatives show that transparency, connectivity and authentic tangible experiences are crucial elements for the luxury watch industry to present to their consumers.



Watchmakers at Vacheron Constantin's stand at SIHH. Image credit: Luxury Society

The watch industry in 2018

SIHH's approach to merging digital experiences with human connection has certainly opened up new prospects for the luxury watch industry.

The event itself has evolved beyond being merely a celebration of fine watchmaking. It has highlighted the idea that luxury watch brands can offer their consumers with authentic experiences as well as establish their presence in the digital world.



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