

JEWELRY

Watchmakers working overtime to reach more female buyers

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Women's watch sales have picked up steam in 2018. Image credit: Eleven James

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Luxury watchmakers' increased focus on the female watch market is paying off, as women's watch sales are rebounding.

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Women's watch sales between January and May 2018 were up 2 percent year-over-year, according to data from NPD Group. After three years of diminished sales, watchmakers have shifted attention back to women-oriented marketing campaigns.

"Historically masculine brands are really doubling down to attract women," said Reginald Brack, executive director and watches industry analyst at **The NPD Group**, Port Washington, NY. "The high-end segment of watches between \$10,000 and \$25,000 grew close to 20 percent."

Women's watches

Nearly 7 million watches were sold to start the year. The lead up to the Valentine's Day and Mother's Day holidays helped boost sales.

New timepiece models made up 7 percent of women's watch sales, with new releases from Michael Kors and Rolex being the most popular.

Making a bigger impact on sales, however, is brands tailoring their marketing strategies to appeal to affluent women.

"Some brands with a traditionally male focus are now hiring female celebrities to be brand ambassadors in their advertising, with Tag Heuer going so far as to dub 2018 its 'year of the woman,'" Mr. Brack said. "These and other efforts by watchmakers are working to focus women's attention on some traditionally male-centered brands."



Cara Delevingne is a brand ambassador for watchmaker Tag Heuer. Image credit: Tag Heuer.

Supermodel and brand ambassador Cara Delevingne is the subject of Tag Heuer's most recent ad campaign in which she spends time with actual wild animals. A video showing a look at what it took to create the content was released along with capturing stills to represent the daringness and wildness of its women's line ([see story](#)).

Tennis player Elina Svitolina has similarly become a brand ambassador for Swiss watchmaker Ulysse Nardin and prominently wore one of the brand's watches, the Classico Jade, during a recent tournament.

Ulysse Nardin's Tie Break Tens initiative is a touring exhibition tournament of some of the top tennis players in the league meant to bring the sport to more people around the world as well as serve as advertising for the brand's luxury watches ([see story](#)).



New campaigns are highlighting independence and female empowerment. Image credit: Audemars Piguet

Rather than leaning on a celebrity brand ambassador, Swiss watchmaker Audemars Piguet is encouraging women to forge their own paths in a futuristic film campaign. A short video for the brand's Millenary collection follows a woman as she goes against the grain.

Each timepiece has a large oval case and off-centred dial. Instead of traditional straps, each model features a hand-made, hand-finished Polish mesh bracelet made of gold coils ([see story](#)).

This also reflects the importance of watchmakers designing timepieces that appeal to women, as well as men.

"Women are enjoying learning more about the machine inside the watch," Mr. Brack said. "Watches are different sizes, not necessarily different genders."

Strengthening sales

There have been signs that the watch industry as a whole is strengthening.

In the year to June, the Swiss watch industry has seen an 11.8 percent year-over-year growth, exceeding 10 billion francs, about even to U.S. dollars at current exchange. This is the strongest first half it has seen in the last six years.

Deliveries to China rose 13 percent in the first half of 2018 and 30 percent in Hong Kong. The United States also supported growth for the industry, with a 9.1 percent increase in shipments ([see story](#)).

Beyond women, the watch industry is seeing interest from a new generation.

After a stagnant few years in the watchmaking industry, younger men are supporting the sector by investing in high-

value timepieces through auctions.

Young men are using watches as a gateway investment, before moving on to categories such as automobiles and wines. Now that women are interested in exclusive watches as well, the timepiece category is seeing a fervent bounce back ([see story](#)).

"Rolex and Patek Philippe drove most of the sales increase within the highest price segments," NPD Group's Mr. Brack said. "However, Audemars Piguet and Piaget also contributed to the women's watch resurgence at the high end of the market."

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