

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Louis Vuitton partners with esports tournament, hinting at gaming's luxury potential

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*Louis Vuitton has created a bespoke trophy trunk for the League of Legends World Championship. Image credit: Riot Games*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

French fashion house Louis Vuitton is embarking on a multichannel partnership with game developer Riot Games, as luxury brands begin to take note of the vast opportunity within the esports industry.

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The Louis Vuitton and Riot collaboration begins with next month's League of Legends World Championship, with the fashion label creating a traveling trophy case for the esports tournament. Although luxury brands have been leveraging gaming for increased fan engagement, the esports market has been mostly untapped.

"It's one of the first partnerships we've seen between a luxury brand and a professional gaming property," said Christophe Jammet, managing director at **DDG**, New York. "It's an atypical sponsorship that was a clever move on the both of their parts."

"The unique nature of the collaboration allows it to create conversation and drive curiosity in both respective industries, professional gaming and luxury goods," he said. "It's genius as the design of a single item is creating a ton of conversation and brand awareness with a new audience."

Mr. Jammet is not affiliated with Louis Vuitton, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Louis Vuitton** was reached for comment.

### Esports engagement

Esports, which primarily takes the form of organized, multiplayer video game tournaments, is a multimillion dollar industry.

According to **PricewaterhouseCoopers**, total esports revenues reached \$805 million in 2018, including \$277 million from sponsorships alone. The United States is the world's largest esports market, followed by China and South Korea, and the audience skews towards younger consumers.

"Louis Vuitton's strategy has always been ensure its brand is part of every major cultural touchpoint in society what's

changed is the touchpoints themselves," said Jasmine Bina, CEO of **Concept Bureau**, Santa Monica, CA. "What's smart is that instead of ruling out something like this because it doesn't carry the traditional markers of heritage or class, Louis Vuitton is embracing it for what it is a symbol of excellence and aspiration.

"This collaboration is also a nod to Louis Vuitton's continued push in Asia and efforts to resonate with a changing consumer class, reflected in many of the Asian teams that will be participating in the League of Legends World Championship," she said. "As more and more young, affluent Asian millennials travel globally, especially those in China, they're coming to embrace a very nuanced, sophisticated and self-directed notion of luxury that goes beyond brand name and history."

Louis Vuitton's partnership with Riot was announced on Sept. 23, coinciding with the drawing for the 2019 League of Legends World Championship. The tournament begins on Oct. 2 in Berlin, and will conclude in Paris on Nov. 10.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

We are honored to announce a landmark collaboration between Louis Vuitton and League of Legends. Read more by going to our Instagram Story. #LVxLOL

A post shared by LoL Esports (@lolesports) on Sep 23, 2019 at 1:07am PDT

*Louis Vuitton and League of Legends have been touting the partnership on social media*

League of Legends is a multiplayer battle arena computer game with more than 100 million monthly active players as of 2016, according to **Riot Games**. The World Championship is the League's most prestigious competition, with the 2018 tournament welcoming 99.6 million unique viewers.

Teams from around the world compete for millions in prize money, with the winners receiving the Summoner's

Cup, named after one of League's most popular game maps. Now Louis Vuitton has created a unique travel trophy case for the Summoner's Cup, the first such trunk in esports.

"The League of Legends World Championship is not only the climax of the tournament: it's where the world of sports and entertainment come together in celebration of new legends to be born," said Michael Burke, chairman/CEO of Louis Vuitton, in a statement. "Louis Vuitton has long been associated with the world's most coveted trophies, and here we are today, alongside the Summoner's Cup.

"We are thrilled to be part of such an iconic event," he said.

Louis Vuitton has previously created bespoke trunks for other famous tournaments, including the FIFA Men's World Cup ([see story](#)).

"Louis Vuitton has to engage millennials if they want to thrive in the future," said Grace Santa Maria, head of marketing at [Rolling Egg Media](#), New York. "What better place to reach up to 300 million eyeballs of this young, target audience than esports?

"Louis Vuitton already has their hand in the world of sports with the trophy carrying cases they make for other major sports," she said. "League of Legends has the potential to be the next FIFA, so this partnership with Riot Games seems like a natural extension of what Louis Vuitton is already doing."

As the World Championship approaches, Louis Vuitton and Riot will also unveil a capsule collection designed by Nicolas Ghesquire, artistic director of women's collections at Louis Vuitton. Other digital collaborations will follow, including unique champion skins.

"No luxury brand has collaborated an online role-playing game to the extent that Louis Vuitton is doing," said Romey Louangvilay, communications director at [ELMNTL](#), New York. "This is truly innovative as Louis Vuitton is combining the online world to the real world, as well as tapping into an audience luxe brands avoided.

"It's great to see that gamers and their buying power being respected in an industry that doesn't normally consider them a viable consumer," he said.

Louis Vuitton has been among the luxury brands most receptive to engage with the gaming world.

For its spring/summer 2016 campaign, Louis Vuitton cast a video game character as a model. The brand teamed up with Final Fantasy creator and developer Square Enix to bring the role playing game's heroine Lightning to life in the advertisements ([see story](#)).

Louis Vuitton recently created a consumer-facing game that tied into the aesthetic of the fall/winter 2019 men's fashion show. The vintage-inspired platformer, dubbed "Endless Runner," asks consumers to try to dodge obstacles in an imagined 1980s-style city.

"It's an interesting diversification that implies that the marketing leaders at Louis Vuitton understand the value and cultural significance of esports, even if it's a relative newcomer to the world of sports," Mr. Jammet said. "PC gamers, as a broad demographic, tend to have higher disposable incomes and have an extremely global footprint, especially across the Asia market, where League of Legends is quite popular.

"It seems like this was a great way for Louis Vuitton to test the waters and diversify its partnership portfolio without risking a huge investment," he said.



*Louis Vuitton's Endless Runner game.*

For Louis Vuitton, an esports sponsorship fits into the label's wider strategy of appealing to younger consumers.

Louis Vuitton has also been using a new form of influencer relationship to cater to a younger generation, as experiential leanings become more important to brands. LVTV features videos ranging from documentary-style atelier visits to influencer cameos and celebrity dressing events, in the hopes of catering to millennials as well as Gen Z consumers ([see story](#)).

"Louis Vuitton is willing to take some risks and explore newer, digitally-oriented forms of sports and entertainment," Mr. Jammet said. "It's a refreshing move that builds brand value and awareness with a constituency that may not have been heavily exposed to the brand otherwise."

#### Luxury gamers

Other luxury fashion brands have turned to gaming and similar tactics to engage with consumers.

"Luxury brands considering getting into the game of esports sponsorship need to ensure their brand aligns with the specific esports partner," said Anthony Cospito, head of strategy at **MI&C**, New York. "It's also important for brands to ensure participation won't alienate core customers and that the execution itself adheres to strict brand codes, authentically deepening equity for younger consumers."

Italian fashion label Fendi gamified interaction with followers on Instagram as part of a campaign teasing its pre-fall 2017 bag collection.

Instagram users could play with Fendi on the application in a series of fun activations that kept fans coming back daily. Players were able to get up close and personal with Fendi's new bags.

Fendi chose the Instagram Story feature for a gamified campaign in which users can come back every day to try something new. Each day Fendi shared a new game on its Story featuring bags from the pre-fall collection ([see story](#)).

Premium automakers have also experimented with gamification.

German automaker Mercedes-Benz is looking to gamify the in-vehicle experience, as future autonomous driving capabilities open the door to more immersive forms of mobile entertainment.

The brand's parent company Daimler is launching the Mercedes-Benz In-Car Gaming Challenge, which asks students, designers and startups to envision gaming solutions for cars and buses, which work with the vehicle's own infrastructure or mobile devices. This global competition reflects the growing effort among automakers to reimagine how the driving experience will look once consumers do not have to take the wheel ([see story](#)).

German automaker Porsche partnered with the makers of a top mobile racing game for a docu-series celebrating the brand's 70th anniversary.

The video series, a joint project between Porsche and game developer Zynga, featured well-known Porsche enthusiasts. Players of the popular mobile racing game CSR Racing 2 were also able to get behind the virtual wheel of each car featured in the series, providing an interactive extension of the content ([see story](#)).

Aside from its CSR2 partnership, Porsche teamed up with Forza Motorsport and ESL, the world's largest esports company, for the 911 GT3 RS Challenge. The competition engaged gamers from around the world who raced online, with the eventual winners getting behind the wheel of Porsche's cars ([see story](#)).

"It's all about tapping into a new consumer," ELMNTL's Mr. Louangvilay said. "If you target the same consumer over and over, your messaging becomes stagnant and it won't resonate as much."