

WATCHES AND JEWELRY

## Breitling's digital transformation quickens amid pandemic

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*Antonio Carriero is chief digital and technology officer of Breitling. Image credit: Breitling*

By ELLEN KELLEHER

Finding fresh ways to connect with customers online is a top priority for Breitling, as the independent Swiss watchmaker seeks new revenue streams in challenging times.

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During a conversation at [Launchmetrics](#)' Performance digital summit on Nov. 5, an executive from Breitling offered a glimpse of the ways in which the prestigious watchmaker is on the hunt to make the experience of buying a watch online as personal as it is at a store. The brand is working to mine data and analytics to reach a suitable level of personalization on the online front.

"A brand has to be able to be the overall digital channel and to invite the consumer in while at the same time providing our partners with capability and support when they're selling online," said Antonio Carriero, chief digital and technology officer at [Breitling](#), Zurich. "We want to be able to get a deeper and larger inventory available for any kind of online sales."

"You have to find a way to blend the digital engagement and the physical engagement as they complement each other," he said.

The discussion with Mr. Carriero was moderated by freelance fashion journalist Laurie Brookins.

Breitling in focus

Once regarded as an old-school Swiss watchmaker, the brand has regained its relevance with the current generation of millennial shoppers partly by embracing digital channels under the leadership of CEO Georges Kern.

Mr. Carriero is one of the leaders behind the digital transformation, and has been working on closing the loop around the watchmaker's customer engagement and digital activation efforts. Breitling is also keeping up with its plans to develop its ecommerce footprint by including more countries in its coverage as well as its platform capabilities ([see story](#)).



*Breitling continues to invest in omnichannel sales strategies. Image credit: Breitling*

The introduction of an innovative blockchain solution has allowed Breitling to add new online services ranging from advanced clienteling to a revolutionary care program. The debut of a new digital warranty also represents a transformation for the company as well as its distributors and retailers.

The watchmaker is pursuing an omnichannel sales strategy to dramatically increase the points of sale.

Breitling is also looking to be consistent across all of its points of sales and provide its customers with a uniform level of quality and care.

The shift in the company's focus on its customers also reflects a desire to be closer to customers' decision-making.

"There's a new audience of new consumers who are buying more and more online and we'd like to tap them," Mr. Carriero said.

He was also quick to point out that buying a watch is an emotional and sometimes irrational decision.

"You don't need more than one watch," Mr. Carriero said.

Mr. Carriero is equally invested in improving the brand's relationships with third-party resellers like Mr Porter, which he regards as very important distribution platforms ([see story](#)).

"They can speak in a more neutral way about the brand," Mr. Carriero said. "They are also playing an important role in the engagement of the customer."

Historically more focused on providing watches for men, Breitling is now branching out to offer classical ones to women.

"A woman is a customer so we have to recognize the same level of interest, engagement and use," Mr. Carriero said.

Another trend is that style is a key purchase motivation rather than the mechanics of a watch, with Mr. Carriero noting fewer customers ask about the power reserve of a timepiece.

Due to the brand's transformation and repositioning, Breitling has moved from being a niche brand to a more inclusive one that appeals to a new clientele. And this new clientele is very keen to engage with the brand through digital channels, and to buy online.



*A Breitling watchmaker at work. Image credit: Breitling*

On top of standard payment capabilities, Breitling is offering new payment options on its web sites and even provides financing when a customer buys online.

Customers are also given the option to pre-order a watch with a partial down payment, allowing customers to lock down and reserve pieces they are really interested in, and also allows us to better forecast product sales.

#### Sustainable shift

On top of all of its recent online advancements, there is also the online trade-in program that Breitling has in collaboration with Crown & Caliber. Here, customers can trade-in their old watches from Breitling, or any other brand, for a voucher towards a new Breitling purchase ([see story](#)).

It is kind of a circular approach that not only generates additional revenue, but allows Breitling to better understand its clientele's interests and profiles, according to Mr. Carriero.

According to a Deloitte survey, executives in the Swiss watch industry are becoming more environmentally conscious. Nearly 90 percent of respondents reported that sustainability and supply chain transparency are important for the sector.

Additionally, while there has been a push to embrace online sales due to COVID-19, more than 70 percent of Swiss watch executives think offline distribution channels will continue to dominate over digital ones ([see story](#)).

This might be true, but Mr Carriero wants to reach a point where digital and physical sales are so complementary that they work in tandem to draw a loyal base of customers.

"We want to position our brand in the future to engage the customer over the long term," he said.

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