

RESEARCH

Tag Heuer cuts Web site response time by 4.3 seconds in Q3: study

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By RACHEL LAMB

Luxury marketers Rolls-Royce, Tag Heuer, Jaguar and Ralph Lauren have posted the fastest Web site response times in the third quarter, giving them an advantage over competitors that may miss transactions due to impatient consumers, according to findings of a study released by AlertSite.

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Watchmaker Tag Heuer cut its Web site response time by 4.3 seconds this quarter from 5.19 seconds to 0.846 seconds by eliminating Flash and heavy-content images from its homepage. The slowest response Web site times included those by Burberry, Hugo Boss, Audi and Mercedes-Benz.

"Both of these industries are taking it very seriously and it is indicative of the fact that the quality of the product is the quality of the Web site," said Gary Beerman, Coconut Creek, FL-based vice president of product management for AlertSite.

"What the luxury brands originally did is put a lot of very sexy Flash and heavy content, but it took a very long time to load – above the industry average," he said. "Affluent consumers are coming to the name-brand sites because they know what they want and they want it to come up quickly."

"If you're on a luxury brand's site, you expect it to be clean and load quickly. At this point, most sites are just reassuring you of the brand image."

AlertSite, recently acquired by SmartBear, monitored the homepages of these luxury brands for response time and site availability from 12 U.S. locations every five minutes from 6 a.m. to 12 noon Eastern Time between July 1 and Sept. 30.

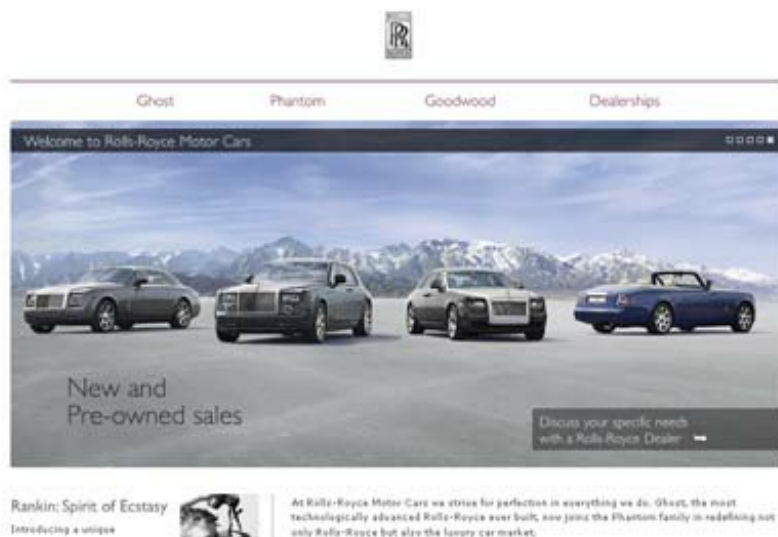
Speeding ahead

The study was split into two segments: automakers and retailers, and their availability and response times.

The majority of the slowest sites were held down by, predictably, Flash and heavy content.

"Sites used to be very slow, but luxury marketers are moving away from Flash and getting a lot better at Web site design," Mr. Beerman said.

Rolls-Royce had the fastest Web site response time of all marketers surveyed. Its site had an average response time of 0.801 seconds. The automaker maintained its reign from the second quarter, where it was the fastest response time at 0.81 seconds.



Rolls-Royce Web site

Close behind was Jaguar at 0.984 seconds. This was an increase from its 3.5-second response time the quarter prior.

The slowest response time for an automaker was Mercedes at 17.032 seconds. This is only a small increase from second quarter's 17.05-second response time.

"Mercedes just has a lot of heavy images that really slow down its site," Mr. Beerman said.



Mercedes Web site

The automaker came in last for response times in the second quarter, as well.

The second-slowest response time for an automaker was Audi, coming in at 8.586 seconds. In the quarter prior, Audi posted a response time of 15.99 seconds.

The average response time of the entire automotive sector was 5.004 seconds.

On the retail side, Tag Heuer was the fastest response time and increased dramatically from the second quarter.



Tag Heuer Web site

The retailer with the second-fastest response time was Ralph Lauren at 1.295 seconds. The lifestyle brand lost its lead from last quarter, where it posted a 1.15-second response time.

Hugo Boss posted the slowest response time for a retailer with 5.736 seconds. In the second quarter, it posted a 7.78-second response time.



Hugo Boss Web site

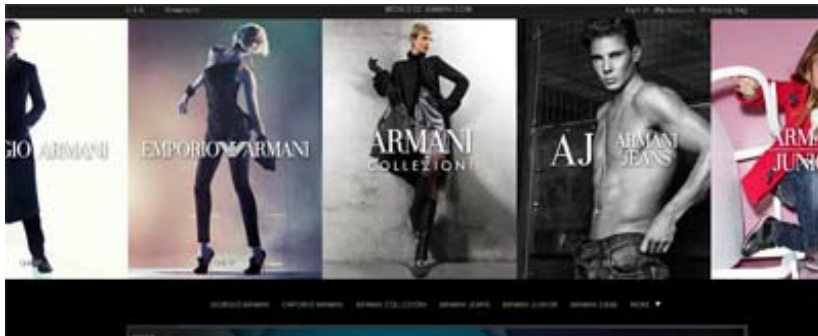
The second-slowest response time for a retailer was Burberry at 4.251 seconds which was quicker than its 4.54-second response time the period before.

The average response time for retailers in the third quarter was 2.85 seconds.

Performance anxiety

Luxury marketers were also tested on site availability.

In the third quarter, Armani took the top spot for reliability with 99.98 percent, an increase from second quarter's 99.93 percent availability.



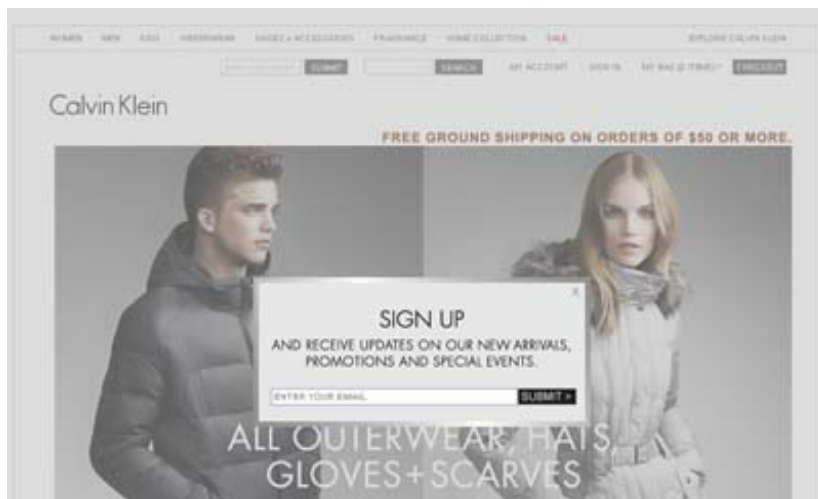
Armani site

Ralph Lauren again was bumped to second place with 99.97 percent availability, which was the same percent recorded from the quarter before.

Tag Heuer tied with Ralph Lauren for site availability in the third quarter. The average availability for retailers in the third quarter was 99.77 percent.

The least-available Web sites for retailers were Burberry at 98.73 percent and Calvin Klein at 99.47 percent.

"Calvin Klein has a lot of pop-ups on its site, which we said takes the site longer to load because you're not actually getting content," Mr. Beerman said. "That's what slowed it down."



Calvin Klein Web site with pop-ups

The quarter before, the two were 99.46 percent and 99.1 percent available, respectively.

The most-available luxury automaker Web sites in the third quarter were Lamborghini at 99.98 percent and Rolls-Royce at 99.97 percent.

In the second quarter, Lamborghini remained constant at 99.98 percent, while Rolls-Royce decreased slightly from 99.98 percent.



Lamborghini site

Meanwhile, Maserati's Web site was the least-available at 99.14 percent and Lincoln at 99.15 percent. In the second quarter, Maserati's average availability was 99.33 percent and Lincoln's was 99.67 percent.



Maserati Web site

The average availability for luxury automakers was 99.7 percent.

Site availability and response time are actually intertwined. Low availability is sometimes attributed to slow response time, according to Mr. Beerman said. If a site did not load within 60 seconds, it was deemed unavailable.

The biggest things that marketers should take away from this study is that consumers are interested in speedy experiences. Making sure a Web site is available and loads quickly is key to having users stay on a branded Web site – or they may leave it for a competitor that has a faster loading time.

“This is a competitive market and brands are expected to deliver high levels of performance across the board for different generations,” Mr. Beerman said. “They need to be cognizant of the types of images they are putting on there and its affect on their site

performance.

“Having a Web site is more than being sexy and flashy and providing content, because some of the time it just ends up being counterproductive,” he said.

Final Take

Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

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