

WATCHES AND JEWELRY

Watches & Wonders returns with virtual, in-person offerings

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H. Moser & Cie is one of the watchmakers participating in Watches & Wonders Geneva 2021. Image Credit: H. Moser & Cie

By KATIE TAMOLA

Luxury watchmakers are looking to seize attention and get their timepieces into the hands of consumers with this year's Watches & Wonders fair, which is resuming after a pandemic-imposed hiatus.

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Between [Watches & Wonders Geneva 2021](#) and [Watches & Wonders Shanghai 2021](#), the events feature both in-person and virtual offerings. Both segments aim to build off pent-up excitement of watch lovers, with brands fostering existing relationships and consumer loyalty, while also hoping that some new products will garner new consumer attention.

"I am of the opinion that virtual attendance will be strong, as there is pent-up demand on a consumer level and a trade level," said Marty Hurwitz, CEO of [MVI Marketing](#), Austin, TX. "Everyone would like to keep the business successes moving forward.

"It's always a challenge to stand out in an event of this nature, especially after months and months of virtual presentations," he said. "However, there is pent-up demand for the brands that are participating and premium watch retailers are keen to hear the latest news, products and offerings directly from the brands themselves."

Watches, wonders and the World Wide Web

Watches & Wonders Geneva 2021, taking place from April 7 through April 13, is entirely virtual, reflecting the ways consumers and brands alike have faced more than a year of adapting and innovating as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The event organizers are highlighting the opportunities for exchanges, networking and interactive features from brands for maximum enjoyment.

Participating watchmakers include Cartier, H. Moser & Cie, IWC Schaffhausen, Montblanc, Patek Philippe, Tag Heuer and Zenith.



The Pioneer Tourbillon MEGA Cool timepiece. Image credit: H. Moser & Cie

Following a year of uncertainty and more limited showcasing options, brands will host disparate virtual presentations throughout the week to highlight new releases.

For instance, on April 6, Swiss watchmaker H. Moser & Cie announced several of its new offerings in a session, including the Pioneer Tourbillon MEGA Cool timepiece, the Pioneer Centre Seconds MEGA Cool and the Endeavour Tourbillon Concept Tiger's Eye.

"The Pioneer MEGA Cool Blue Lagoon is the ultimate watch to finally go out and hopefully to celebrate the return of sunny days ahead," said Edouard Meylan, CEO of H. Moser & Cie, in a statement. "If H. Moser was a stone, what would it be?"

"Falcon's Eye and Ox's Eye, both beautiful variations of the Tiger's Eye family, seemed like the perfect fit for us," he said. "I am looking forward to presenting those two."

The fair organizers are also focusing on digital content to keep horological enthusiasts engaged.

The Watches & Wonders morning show, presented by arts presenter Belle Donati, will offer daily roundups throughout the week. The Lab Minute series will also offer live news and expert analyses.

As of April 7, consumers will be able to access the public pages of the Watches & Wonders website even if they did not register for the event. These pages will list publications of the participating brands and the daily retrospect in the morning show.

"I expect brands to have invested heavily in digital media in order to make themselves stand out," said Donnie Pacheco, founder of [Donnie P. Consulting](#), Seattle. "The event promises to make a seamless transition to a branded event by clicking to immerse yourself in a branded experience."

"Brands will have worked hard to create a completely online branded environment with videos, interactive sessions, education and heavy on imagery," he said. "Brands will also do their best to make it as engaging and unique as possible, so people spend more time in their online branded environment."



Technology and digital media will play an important role in this year's fairs. Image credit: Watches & Wonders

Following the event in Geneva, Watches & Wonders Shanghai will be an in-person fair from April 14 to April 18. It will take place at the West Bund Art Center and feature demonstrations, presentations about watchmaking excellence and expert-led panels and talks.

Brands exhibiting in China include Cartier, Chopard, IWC Schaffhausen, Montblanc, Panerai, Rolex and more. Watchmakers will welcome visitors at pop-up booths inside the hall at this invitation-only event that will also have strict safety measures.

Growth and the future

The in-person segment of Watches & Wonders seems to be steadily growing.

This year, 18 brands will be featured at Watches & Wonders Shanghai, an increase from the 13 brands that presented at Watches & Wonders in September 2013 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. It has always been an exclusive event that showcases the culture and heritage of watchmaking to the Asian market that invites brands to introduce products and brand history to developing markets ([see story](#)).

Last year, Switzerland's Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie, producer of the Watches & Wonders show that was previously known as SIHH, launched a site at watchesandwonders.com. It is highly visual, with photographs and videos from participating watchmakers focused on news, information on a Swiss watch business under pressure from two trade fairs canceled last year because of the COVID-19 lockdown, and will be used this year to list brands' disparate virtual presentations and efforts ([see story](#)).

With most of the world slowly trying to adapt to a world without COVID-19, many people are curious to see if Watches & Wonders Shanghai will be successful and engaging. With the event offering both virtual and in-person segments, watch lovers do have an abundance of options, and brands are hoping this will translate to a high level of engagement.

"It would be great to have in-person events along with virtual activities, but that is very much a dynamic situation, with daily news and outbreaks affecting the possibilities moment by moment," MVI Marketing's Mr. Hurwitz said. "I'm sure people would love to participate in person, but I just don't know that circumstances will be favorable."

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