

MARKETING

In 2021, there are ambassadors for every brand

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NFL quarterback Aaron Rodgers is one of the faces for Zenith in North America. Image credit: Zenith

By KATIE TAMOLA

For luxury brands seeking a famous face to attach to its product, the current landscape provides a myriad of effective ambassadors.

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The world of brand ambassadors and celebrity partnerships is constantly evolving, with luxury labels relying on some of the world's most famous faces in acting, entertainment, sports and social media to extend their reach. Whether literally the star of a show or an influencer dominating Instagram, consumers continue to seek star power and authenticity from their ambassadors across the board.

"I believe the number one thing a brand should look for in a brand ambassador is a natural affinity not only for the product but also for the values it stands for," said Julien Tornare, CEO of **Zenith**, Neuchtel, Switzerland.

"People who feel represented by some of our ambassadors, including Aaron Rodgers and Xiao Zhan, in who they are and the values they stand for, therefore see themselves somewhat represented in Zenith by their affiliation to us and as representatives and supporters of them," he said. "Ambassadorships and partnerships are always evolving, or should continuously evolve while at the same time always staying true to our core foundation."

"However, we must be creative and remember that there is greatness all around us."

Ambassadors for everyone

Brands use famous faces to catch a consumer's eye, but the selection process must be strategic and thoughtful.

When successful, ambassadors' authentic connections to consumers helps translate fandom into awareness and purchase dollars. While some ambassadors may be more recognizable than others, a successful partnership relies on the face of the brand representing the product with pride.



Naomi Osaka, one of the best tennis players in the world, is an ambassador for two LVMH brands. Image credit: Tag Heuer

A recognizable face gets the product in front of a consumer, but there must be a sense of brand alignment and authenticity to convert discoveries to purchases.

"After the last year we have had, authenticity and relatability are the two factors that move the needle in digital marketing," said Julianne Fraser, digital and influencer marketing expert and founder of [Dialogue New York](#). "While protecting prestige is vital to luxury brands, marketers have discovered a way to marry the two."

"A genuine connect and love for the product and brand [is necessary]," she said. "If that doesn't exist, you can't fake the rest."

Brands have looked beyond their own domains for decades, enlisting athletes or entertainers to hawk their products.

Soft drink brand [Red Rock Cola](#) was one of the first U.S. companies to highlight a public figure when it tapped iconic baseball player Babe Ruth for a campaign in the 1930s.

Luxury brands continue this tradition today, recruiting some of the world's elite athletes to attract sports fans and younger consumers.

In January 2021, Swiss watchmaker Tag Heuer enlisted tennis champion Naomi Osaka as its newest ambassador athlete as the brand continues to move in a younger and more diverse direction. The same month, French fashion label Louis Vuitton announced Ms. Osaka as its latest house ambassador in another youthful push ([see story](#)).

In January, Zenith named future Hall of Fame quarterback Aaron Rodgers as the brand's new face in North America.

One of the best players in the National Football League, Mr. Rodgers exemplifies the watchmaker's ethos of "reaching your star" by reaching the apex of his sport. Luxury watch brands, in particular, often enlist athletes as ambassadors because of their reputations for elite performance and precision in their respective games ([see story](#)).

Brands including Zenith, however, do not limit themselves with athletic ambassadors and turn to other areas to reach broader audiences.



Chinese singer and actor Xiao Zhan for Zenith. Image credit: Zenith

Last month, Zenith encouraged younger consumers to pursue their ambitions with a campaign starring its new brand ambassador, Chinese actor and singer Xiao Zhan ([see story](#)).

Mr. Xiao began his career as a singer on a reality television competition and has become one of the most in-

demand celebrities in China also drawing attention from Italian fashion brand Tod's, which named him as an ambassador earlier this year ([see story](#)).

"I think it's important never to limit oneself, or the brand, to only one type of personality as ambassadors," Zenith's Mr. Tornare said. "The important thing is to work with people who properly represent the values of the brand, for us it is about constantly innovating and working to be better than before, while staying true to our roots and respecting our history."

Social media stars

The power of influencers cannot be overlooked for brands looking to engage with younger audiences.

"The shift to influencers is really born out of two intersecting realities: influencers have greater visibility on social media than most traditional celebrities, and the engagement they're able to drive on those platforms algorithmically increases the visibility of the brands an influencer represents," said Brady Donnelly, managing director of [Sela](#), New York.

In May, Italian jeweler Bulgari tapped Italian influencer and entrepreneur Chiara Ferragni as its newest ambassador.



Italian influencer Chiara Ferragni is a global ambassador for Bulgari. Image credit: Bulgari

Ms. Ferragni, who announced her new role as a Bulgari global ambassador on her personal Instagram page, described a strong connection to the brand in her announcement. With more than 23 million Instagram followers, Bulgari hopes Ms. Ferragni can help the brand continue to extend to new and young audiences ([see story](#)).

More recently, LVMH-owned beauty label Guerlain has named French makeup artist Violette Serrat as its new creative director of makeup. In addition to roles at Dior, Sephora and Este Lauder, she has cultivated a side career as influencer, with more than 413K Instagram followers and 302K YouTube subscribers ([see story](#)).

These influencer partnerships grab headlines, and fan dollars follow.

According to Launchmetrics' State of Influencer Marketing Report 2020, 94 percent of professionals believe influencer activations drive sales ([see story](#)).

"It's not simply that influencers have greater reach than many celebrities, but that influencers or ambassadors are able to scale that reach on a technical level to multiply its value," Mr. Donnelly said. "I don't think the audience has necessarily changed, but the way audiences consume media and content certainly have evolved."

A place for the A-List

Even as brand ambassadorships change and achieving celebrity status itself becomes more accessible, luxury will always have room for major movie stars and models.

French fashion label Chanel has long recognized this, particularly with its iconic fragrances.

Since the 1960s, stars including Ali MacGraw, Catherine Deneuve, Nicole Kidman, Audrey Tautou, Brad Pitt, Gisele Bndchen and Marion Cotillard have been ambassadors for Chanel No. 5 not including other longtime Chanel ambassadors such as Keira Knightley.

Meanwhile, France's Dior counts Academy Award-winners Charlize Theron, Jennifer Lawrence and Natalie Portman as longtime house ambassadors.

Happy Julia, happy diamonds

In May, Swiss jeweler Chopard called on beloved actor Julia Roberts to help convey diamond-induced joy in a campaign that relied on her famous smile.

Print and digital assets showed Ms. Roberts jovially smiling, dancing and catering to the camera while wearing the latest Happy Sport timepiece. The accompanying short film highlighted the maison's iconic moving diamonds and the inherent joy woven throughout the brand ([see story](#)).

Bulgari's roster of ambassadors includes both ambassadors such as Ms. Ferragni and actors with global followings such as Zendaya.

The Roman jeweler revealed Indian actress and singer Priyanka Chopra Jonas was revealed as its newest ambassador on Aug. 1. In social media images announcing her new role, Ms. Chopra Jonas is dressed in a white off-the-shoulder blouse complemented by two elegant rings and a gold necklace from the B.Zero1 collection ([see story](#)).

According to Launchmetrics, Ms. Chopra Jonas' announcement post brought Bulgari \$969,000 in media impact value in three days, exceeding the impact of the brand's own announcement.

"I see ambassador selection becoming more nuanced over time," Sela's Mr. Donnelly said. "What previously would have been a single face might be a hundred faces spread across different countries, cities, and demographics, all representing a brand in the context of different consumer segments."

"As for the A-list, there's no doubt celebrities still have international appeal," he said. "Hollywood is making a concerted effort for its films and stars to have global reach, particularly between the U.S. and China, which are obviously luxury's most sought-after markets, and for a brand that needs a recognizable face for a global audience, the A-list is likely where they'll find it."

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