

AUTOMOTIVE

Bentley goes full throttle on consumer engagement, sustainability

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With the new Continental GT Speed model, Bentley aimed to combine luxury and performance. Image courtesy of Bentley Motors

By NORA HOWE

British automaker Bentley Motors has not only navigated the obstacles brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic through technical innovation and reimagined consumer engagement, but has positioned itself as a leader in sustainable luxury.

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The brand recently introduced its newest GT Speed model, which intends to deliver the peak performance and luxury its customers have grown to expect from the British marque. In line with its ongoing and frequent efforts toward a greener automotive industry, the new model was designed and developed in Bentley's carbon-neutral production facilities.

"Bentley was the first automotive brand in the world to announce full electrification by 2030, not just in the luxury sector, but in all sectors," said Mike Sayer, head of product communications at **Bentley Motors**, Crewe. "We believe sustainability has to be at the center of everything Bentley stands for going forwards, in order to not only remain relevant, but to thrive."

In this Q&A, Mr. Sayer and Bentley Motors' chief communications/marketing office Jeff Kuhlman discuss how the brand is approaching the market with the new Continental GT Speed, ways they have maintained consumer engagement throughout the pandemic and how Bentley differentiates itself as a sustainable luxury business. Here is the dialogue:



Mike Sayer (left) and Jeff Kuhlman (right). Images courtesy of Bentley Motors

What does the new Continental GT Speed launch mean for the brand?

Mike Sayer: The Continental GT Speed is a real celebration of the evolution of both the Continental family and its iconic W12 engine. With Bentley on a journey to become the world's most sustainable luxury mobility company, with electrification at the heart of the strategy, it is clear that the W12 will be retired in the future.

Before it does, we can enjoy it as the world's most advanced 12-cylinder engine one that gives the GT Speed breathtaking outright performance and unrivaled Grand Touring style.

The car is the most dynamic Bentley yet. The advancements we have made in chassis technology give the Speed a blend of ride comfort and handling that we believe is totally unique.

It is the ultimate Bentley grand tourer, the pinnacle of the almost-20-year Continental GT.

How does the brand's focus on sustainability differentiate it from other luxury automakers?

Mike Sayer: The challenges of climate change affect us all, and Bentley believes that we must not only do our part, but go even further by setting our own stretch targets to becoming the world's leading sustainable luxury mobility company.

To do this, we are working to a level of detail that no other luxury car brand comes close to.

We already have the world's first carbon-neutral factory for luxury car manufacture, run entirely on renewable or green-certified energy. We are looking at how we decarbonize the entire lifecycle of our products which includes research into new sustainable materials, renewable fuels, recyclability and green energy sources.

This work goes from major projects like the design of our first BEV to myriad smaller ones, such as promoting biodiversity across our Crewe campus, capturing and using rainwater and developing vegan interior materials.

Have you shifted branding/marketing strategies to better resonate with consumers in the Americas?

Jeff Kuhlman: We have. Over the past two years, we've revised our approach in the Americas region to reflect a balance between paid media and experiential.

In what ways has Bentley continued to engage with current and prospective clients during the various phases of the pandemic?

Jeff Kuhlman: Everything starts with understanding and respecting local guidelines and pandemic regulations. In the Americas, we set out to design programming that was very intimate.

Prior to the pandemic, we were more focused on paid campaigns and less on events. The investment in resources and the stress on the system to generate these campaigns was not justified by the lead generation.

We shifted that focus in two primary ways.



Interior of the Bentley Continental GT Speed Convertible in orange flame. Image courtesy of Bentley Motors

First, we developed our paid campaigns with a longer time duration. This allowed us to connect with more consumers and to fully engage them in the campaign.

Second, we shifted more resources to high-touch activations that were run by Bentley, by our retailers, or jointly. These activations were mostly intimate events, where we chose to keep the group size limited, we provided driving as much as possible and we had the opportunity to meet and greet everyone who attended.

This intimate approach also appealed to customers during the pandemic, as they appreciated that they were arriving at a room that had the feel of close friends getting together versus a party of a hundred strangers. Most of the activations were limited to 30 people, which increased the connection of everyone involved.

So often with the large events, I find it difficult to meet everyone, and as a Bentley representative, it's impossible to say "hello" to each client. Our aim is to be approachable and to spend time with as many clients as we can something that is very important to Bentley as a luxury brand.

Bentley expects to sell more Continental GTs in the U.S. market than anywhere else. Why is that?

Jeff Kuhlman: Americas has been the largest Bentley market for some time, and most recently in 2020 with record sales.

That said, customers in the market want the best and are accustomed to having more space to use his and her cars. The Continental GT Speed is still a grand tourer, with maximum performance and maximum luxury, with no compromise to either, which suits American customers.

They see and value the Speed as a pinnacle of performance within the lineup and always have.