

INTERNET

Luxury automakers battle for face time on Google+

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By RACHEL LAMB

Luxury auto competitors are putting their gloves on and extending their reach to affluent consumers through social media with the addition of Google+ accounts.

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Often some of the most prominent users of social media sites, automakers including Audi, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Lexus have recently made and are using Google+ pages. Google+ allows consumers to stay in touch with brands on a new and exciting platform.

“Google+ offers a couple different value-adds that aren’t really being seen in other social networks,” said Ron Schott, senior strategist at **Spring Creek Group**, Seattle. “By starting a Google+ presence, [automakers] can now market to customers in audience segments using ‘Circles.’”

“This one fact means that marketing messaging can be tailored to fit each audience, enhancing impact and lessening wasted messaging that can actually turn targets off if the information isn’t directed at their wants and needs,” he said. “Secondly, for a brand that creates incredibly stunning vehicles, the chance to use Google Hangouts to showcase, unveil and talk about those cars is definitely a value-add.”

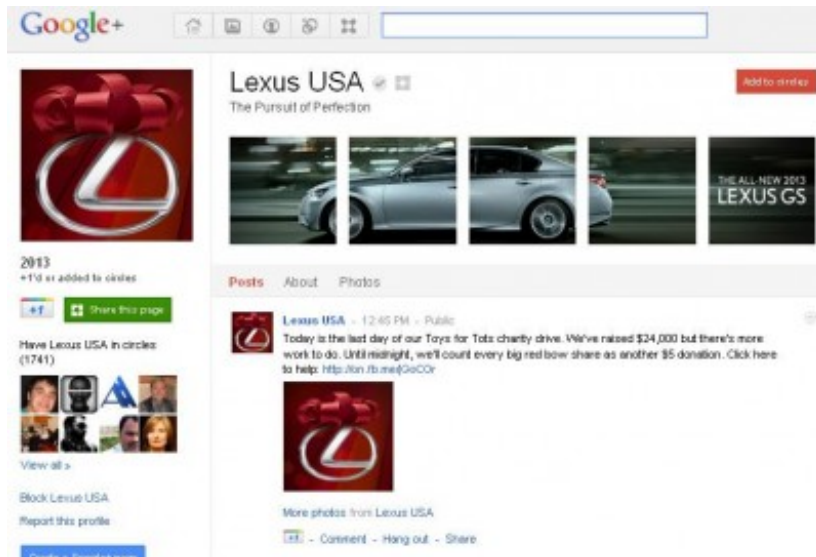
Mr. Schott is not affiliated with Google or any automaker. He has agreed to comment as

an industry expert on social media marketing.

Revving up

Luxury automakers are using Google+ to attract consumers, but each has its own unique voice.

For example, Lexus' page focused on its Toys for Tots campaign around the holiday season. In this initiative, the automaker donated \$5 to the organization for each post shared from late December until today ([see story](#)).



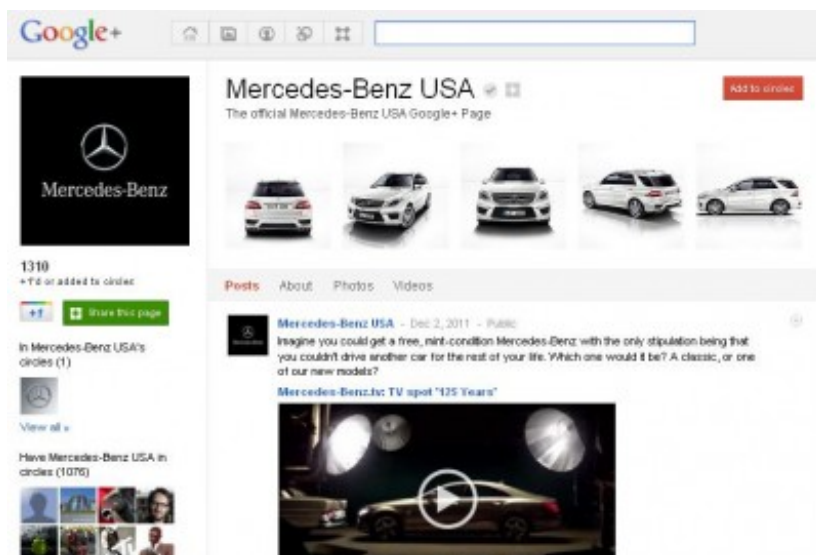
Lexus' Google+ page

The automaker also focuses on its new financial services iPhone application and random campaign images.

Meanwhile, Mercedes-Benz USA is also trading into Google+.

Where Lexus uses Google+ for campaign advertising, Mercedes engages with consumers by asking them questions.

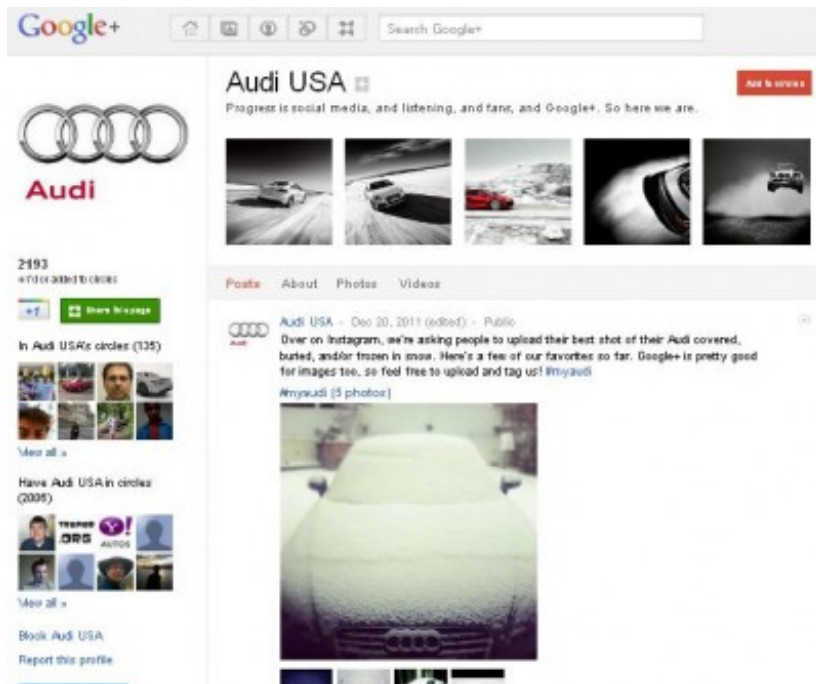
Furthermore, Mercedes includes more product images, almost entirely of the 2012 ML63 AMG, and gives detailed product information.



Mercedes' Google+ page

On the other hand, Audi is connecting its Google+ page with Instagram, of which the automaker is already an avid user.

Consumers are invited to send pictures of their cars buried in snow to be featured on Audi's Google+ page.



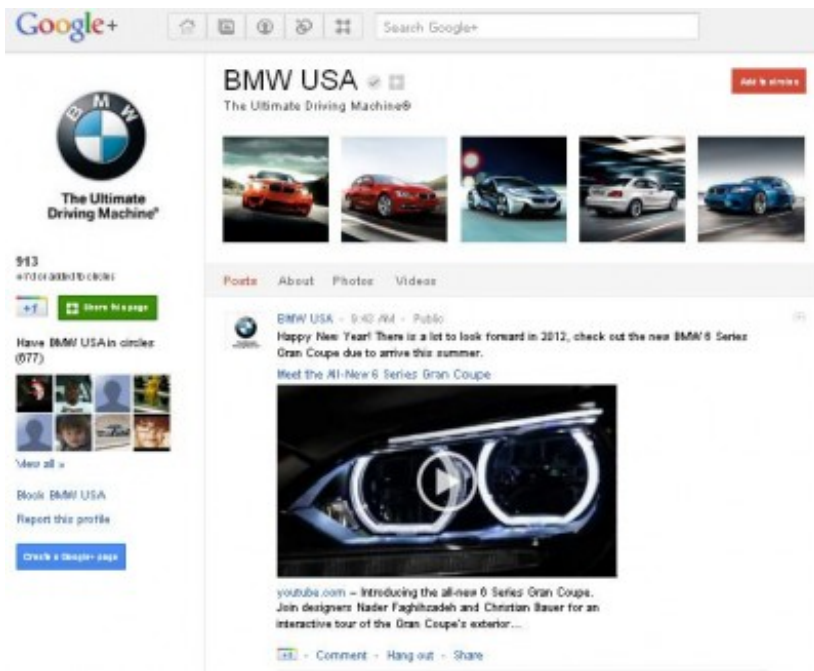
Audi's Google+ page

Audi also focuses heavily on its sport vehicles, such as those that participate in races such as Le Mans.

This could give Audi fans on Google+ another window into the branded world.

Another competitor on Google+ is BMW. The automaker takes advantage of the medium in a completely different way, using video as its primary message.

Different models, such as the BMW 3-Series sedan, BMWi electric cars and the BMW M5 are showcased through using videos posted on the brand's page.



BMW Google+ page

Turning a new page

As more luxury brands are filing into social media and especially Google+, it is not enough to just be there anymore. Rather, brands must set themselves apart to get attention.

Audi, Mercedes, BMW and Lexus are one another's greatest competitors. Just as the automakers are vying for consumer attention on other platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, Google+ is no different.

That said, these automakers are definitely adding value to their marketing strategies because they can try new techniques and find out what does and does not work before the masses get to Google+.

"Chances are, fans of Lexus on Facebook who also have Google+ accounts will become followers of Lexus on Google+ as well," Mr. Schott said. "We're not seeing a big influx of net new fans for brands starting their Google+ pages."

"However, being there first gives Lexus a leg up on their competitors in the fact that they can try and try again with new features and ways of interacting with their audiences that their competitors will just have to do later on down the road," he said. "That way, if Google+ usage does actually pick up to the point where it becomes a true Facebook competitor, Lexus will already be out of the starting blocks."

Final Take

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