

MARKETING

Key takeaways: 'Big in China: Brand collaboration' webinar

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A shot of Scarlett Yang's work for the Spirit of Ecstasy Challenge with Rolls-Royce. Image credit: Rolls-Royce Twitter

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As the boundaries of high and low culture have diminished within the luxury space, there are no limits to brand collaboration in China currently.

From pet retailers tapping designer streetwear talent to established labels inviting emerging names to inject a sense of freshness, a range of imaginative co-branded collections continues to surface.

However saturated, China remains a sensitive market, so brands must take care when looking to leverage these lucrative opportunities.

There is no denying that the marketing exposure which partnerships offer is extremely valuable, not least in combining audiences and attracting new consumers. Still, this does come with risk.

Advising readers on how to securely enter the jam-packed space of crossovers, the "**Big in China: Brand collaboration**" market research report provides an effective breakdown for 2022. It is a destination to discover the current trends, best practices and what not to do when producing a product line with an external company.

As an extension of the research report's content, on Oct. 25 we invited expert panelists to speak about their brand collaboration experience in the local market. The webinar featured Olivia Plotnick of Wai Social, APPortfolio's Keith Wong and multidisciplinary artist Scarlett Yang.

The scope of what is currently occurring in the sector can hardly be reduced to an hour-long discussion, yet there were some nuggets of information. Here are *Jing Daily's* top five takeaways.

Use collaboration to create newness that you cannot replicate in-house

Keith Wong noted that companies excelling in one solo category should look to collaboration to extend their product offering, discovering avenues of newness.

"The key is mixing all things up, but to portray the same brand identity that one is known for," he said.

Scarlett Yang agreed, adding that the main common thread between all of her collaboration proposals so far is a desire for innovation:

"A lot of brands want to work with a multidisciplinary artist to make their brand future-proof," she said. "They want a wave of [something new] while evolving their brand identity."

The development of consumer behavior is that people are exceptionally hungry for brand refreshes constantly.

As Olivia Plotnick observed, collaboration "not only leverages new audiences through social media" but "is an opportunity to create something new, something unexpected."

Make brand background checks your top priority

In 2022, brand and key opinion leaders (KOL) cancellations are a much higher risk in China.

Celebrities daily are being called out for missteps or their controversial histories, meaning that labels need to have a strict approach to their own image. This is why speakers agreed that companies must be doing background checks on their potential collaborators.

Once you are associated with another identity, there is no going back.

"Risk level is a key concern in China," Mr. Wong said. "When working with an artist or organization, we browse their Instagram, check what they did in the past, what their life is about, and what kind of followers they have."

According to him, social media provides a sense of transparency that allows you to decide if another outfit is actually suitable for you.

When working with KOLs, always have a backup plan

Of course, there are immediate marketing benefits of incorporating popular KOLs with powerful fanbases into branded collections.

However, both Ms. Plotnick and Mr. Wong emphasized just how important it is to have a backup strategy in case the aforementioned inevitable happens: a boycott or canceling.

Ms. Plotnick argued that internally, companies should be asking themselves how they are going to address a celebrity getting canceled even before cementing any partnerships.

"Are you going to throw the artist under the bus? There should be a plan," Ms. Plotnick said. "If it goes wrong quickly, then how are you going to respond?"

"As we know, in any market, silence can sometimes make the problem worse," she said.

Think of ways that you can connect both social media accounts through the marketing content

Just because two entities are promoting a collaboration on separate social media channels does not mean they cannot work together to create a joint visual concept.

For example, Ms. Plotnick referred to a recent campaign by Mercedes and BMW, where you could only see the full image of the advertisement when holding up posts from both accounts.

"Brands can hide little Easter eggs in their social platforms, connecting broadcasting and sales," she said.

2022 demands innovation because the customer's attention span is at its lowest.

"We have this new evolution of consumer behavior," Ms. Plotnick said. "Consumers want to be shown something new, they want to be shown something unexpected. That's played a role in how hungry people in China are for brand collaborations."

Do not underestimate Gen Z in China

Finally, the demographic on everyone's lips: Gen Z.

Mr. Wong outlined how Chinese youth have carved out their own understanding and perspectives, with money to spend not only on products, but new experiences.

"Even in the past four years, they have changed a lot," Mr. Wong said.

"At the start, they were more focused on global media, following the most must-have items, whereas now they are

just very smart consumers," he said.

Those experiences are predominantly digitally-led, too.

The extent of Gen Z's technological intelligence in the mainland cannot be overlooked by brands when they are launching collaborations.

Ms. Yang emphasized that young people can see through a poor online campaign immediately.

"It needs to be a 360-degree, exciting experience," Ms. Yang said.

Download the "Big in China: Brand collaboration" report today

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