

RESEARCH

TAG Heuer, Jaguar post fastest site-loading times in Q1

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By TRICIA CARR

Luxury marketers TAG Heuer and Jaguar stayed consistent in terms of Web site load time in the first quarter of this year likely due to increased image optimization and simplistic homepage design that keeps users engaged. However, a major German automaker fell behind.

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TAG Heuer and Jaguar came out on top in the first quarter with the quickest homepage load times among several luxury marketers measured for performance. Brands can continue this trend by concentrating on above-the-fold content and carefully installing social media images and add-ons.

“Luxury brands are doing extremely well in relation to other brands in terms of availability, especially luxury automakers,” said Gary Beerman, Coconut Creek, FL-based vice president of product management for AlertSite.

“I think what we are really seeing now is the consciousness among luxury brands that consumers expect quality in a product to be there as much as they expect quality on a brand’s Web site,” he said. “This is very important since these brands have an international audience visiting their sites.”

SmartBear's **AlertSite** checks the response times of luxury retailers and automakers every five minutes from 12 locations around the country.

SmartBear Software provides tools for companies to improve quality and performance.

Driving traffic

Web site availability remains high among luxury marketers, especially automakers.

Of the luxury automakers examined, Lamborghini, Mercedes-Benz, Rolls-Royce, Range Rover, Jaguar, Ferrari and Lexus had site availability scores of more than AlertSite's benchmark average of 99.82 percent.



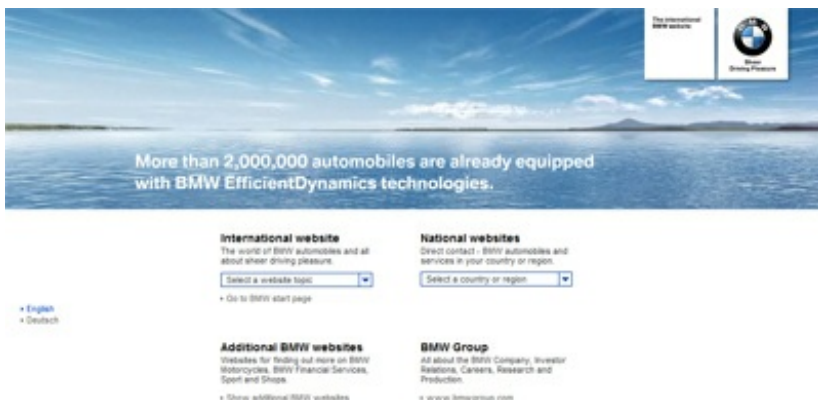
Lamborghini landing page

Jaguar continued its lead in the automotive category with a page load time of 1.1604 seconds, with Rolls-Royce following closely at 1.3536 seconds.



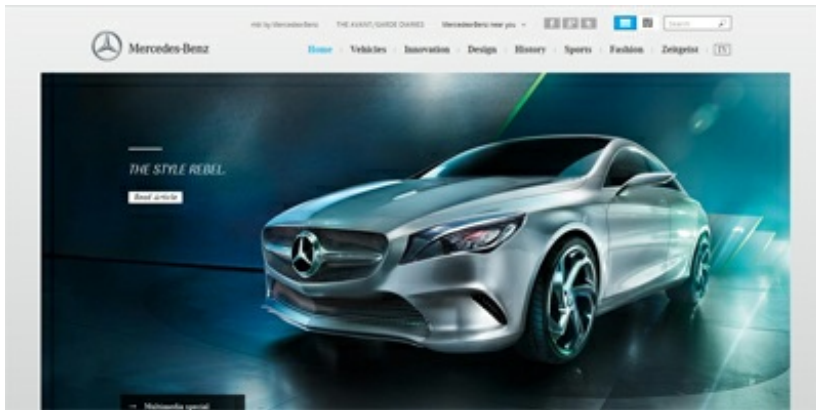
Jaguar landing page

BMW, Range Rover and Porsche had impressive page load times of 2.3587, 2.3667 and 2.9862 seconds, respectively.



BMW landing page

Mercedes suffered in terms of page load time this quarter due to a large image that was placed on its homepage that showed a drawing of a concept vehicle, per Mr. Beerman.



Mercedes Web site

When the image was removed on Feb. 21, the page load time decreased from 16.26 seconds to 5.55 seconds, according to the research.



Mercedes concept vehicle image

The image took approximately 9 seconds to load. This gave the automaker an average page load time of 11.326 seconds for the first quarter.

It is not typical to see a drop that drastic and was most likely an error in neglecting to optimize the image for the Web, according to Mr. Beerman.

Full-page response time is measured with all images on a page, which is why this glitch effected the automaker's load time.

In the fourth quarter of last year, Cadillac's page load time was also hindered with a concept vehicle image.

In addition, Aston Martin had a relatively low page load time of 8.8559 seconds last quarter.



Aston Martin Web site

“Marketers always need to be cognizant of the fact that size matters,” Mr. Beerman said. “If images are not optimized, it will take a long time to load them and the site will appear to be slower.

“The site is being loaded by thousands of people and one image changed the whole experience,” he said.

Marketers should continue to keep their site load times at less than four seconds, Mr. Beerman said.

This can be done by being conscious of image size and social media add-ins.

“If a site takes too long to load, consumers will go somewhere else who gives a better-quality experience,” Mr. Beerman said.

“More revenue is lost from slow Web sites than from sites being down,” he said. “Brands will lose revenue if a consumer abandons them online.”

The homepage debate

Brands that focus on above-the-fold content seem to have better outcomes in terms of page load time.

For example, TAG Heuer’s **Web site** opens to a simple page with a watch image and a choice of country. This gives the consumer an entry point that loads quickly while assuring the consumer that he has reached the correct place.



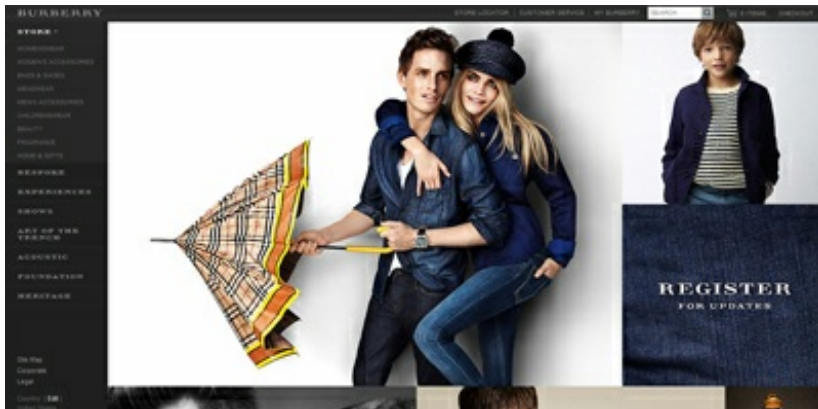
Tag Heuer Web site

The brand can then add more optimized content on additional landing pages once the

user has clicked to the site corresponding to the correct location in the world.

TAG Heuer came in first of all luxury brands examined in page load time of 0.9917 seconds.

Meanwhile, the above-the-fold theory could explain Burberry's relatively low availability score.



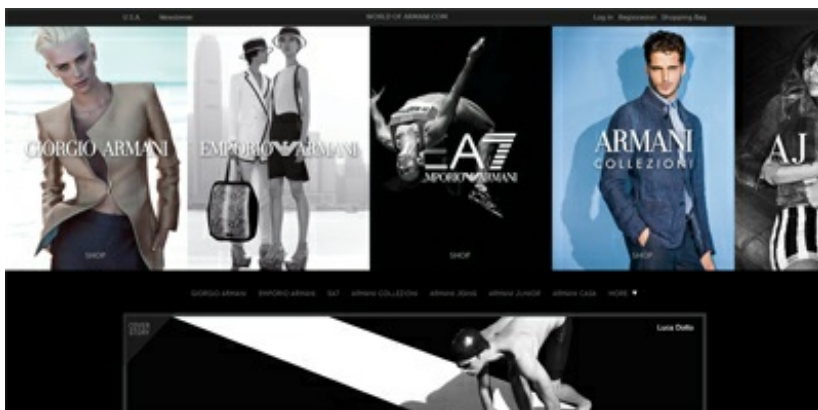
Burberry Web site

Burberry had a 96.36-percent availability in the first quarter, according to the research.

This is low in comparison to other luxury brands studied such as Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior and Versace that were more than 99 percent in page availability.

Burberry's U.S. [homepage](#) contains three pages of images, only a third of which are displayed before the “fold” or the end of the viewing plane on an Internet browser.

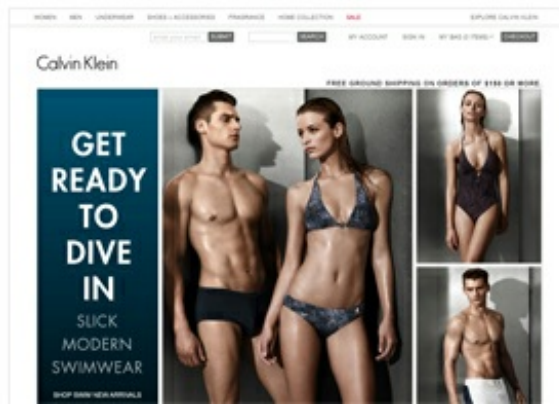
[Armani](#) uses this same style in its Web site execution. The label immediately offers three pages worth of images and content.



Armani Web site

Armani had a below-average page load time of 4.9724 seconds and a 99.71 percent availability this quarter.

Calvin Klein had a low page load time of 5.1442 seconds compared to other brands of its kind. Its Web site features some content below the fold.



Calvin Klein Web site

Adding social media images and feeds to a homepage can also affect the loading times, per Mr. Beerman.

Many luxury marketers have added emblems of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to their Web sites. These could slow down loading time because these images contain additional content to be loaded such as links.

Luxury marketers may be working on optimizing their Web sites, but at the same time they are adding these social media plug-ins that basically consume their resources, per Mr. Beerman.

Brands need to be just a conscientious when adding these social media plug-ins to their sites since these also attribute to their performance, he said.

"Marketers have to understand the impact and not assume that social media is free," Mr. Beerman said. "It comes with benefits, but is also a detriment to a Web site.

"Luxury brands and automotive companies are doing very well in availability," he said. "The scores cannot get much better.

"At the same time, they should remain mindful of images and social media links and go into it with an open mind."

Final Take

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