

MULTICHANNEL

## Bentley COO: Strive to stay relevant, but never compromise brand DNA

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By TRICIA CARR

NEW YORK - The president and chief operating officer of Bentley Motors, Inc. who keynoted Luxury Daily's Luxury FirstLook: Strategy 2013 conference said that marketers must use multiple channels to show consumers their vision, but should not participate in any effort that could destroy the brand's DNA.

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During the "Bentley Motors: How the Leading Luxury Auto Brand Makes Key Marketing Strides While Maintaining its Heritage" opening keynote, the executive said that marketers, especially those in the automotive sector, should use their passion for creating the best products and services in their respective category to propel the brand beyond competitors. Bentley kept the brand top-of-mind among top-tier consumers by remaining highly relevant and not compromising the brand through price or mass marketing efforts.

"You have to create new market segments, understand the trends and shape the future," said Christophe Georges, president and chief operating officer of **Bentley Motors Inc.**, Herndon, VA.

Driving passion

Bentley drives luxury performance, per Mr. Georges.

Quite often when a brand has been given the ability to drive the industry, it is challenging to express that passion.

Bentley vehicles are not simply an expression of one's wealth. Therefore, there is more that consumers must understand about the brand since customers are driven much more by these values than pure expression of wealth.

Marketing and engineering go hand-in-hand at Bentley.

In 2003, the market was much more saturated with models on the lower-end of the price scale.

Bentley looked to move the market. By 2008, the automaker created a new market and increased the price point of the luxury automotive industry.

"You need to have a very strong vision to believe that the market is going to move this way," Mr. Georges said.



*Mr. Georges*

Relevancy rules

Bentley markets itself with the goal of maintaining relevance among its target audience in a changing world.

Years ago, technology and cars were perceived as an enemy of society. In contrast, today environmentally compatible technology is looked upon as symbol of status and lifestyle.

Bentley began a project to create a pinnacle luxury performance SUV. The luxury automaker looked to take its values of design, craftsmanship and engineering excellence to a new level.

The EXP 9 F SUV concept was revealed in March 2012. There were more than 2,000 purchase intents received as of September 2012.

"Keeping the relevance of the brand means entering into the SUV marketplace," Mr. Georges said.

Not to be compromised

The most important aspect of Bentley's marketing strategy is to not compromise the brand, per Mr. Georges.

If the customer does not want to buy from the brand anymore, do not turn to discounts or efforts that could diminish the brand to achieve customer satisfaction.

Luxury brands need to create a strategy to re-emerge in the market by becoming relevant to the customer while sticking to the brand's DNA.

Brands need to plan for the future to keep from becoming irrelevant.

A small percent of consumers as a whole are buying luxury cars, so remaining relevant to those consumers is key.

Also, no communication should be fake.

"Being relevant is absolutely essential in the marketplace," Mr. Georges said.

Digital could be very dangerous.

The picture of luxury demand does not always align with the mass reach of digital channels.

The conversation on the digital medium, for example, cannot always be controlled.

Luxury brands should look to manage the message of these conversationists.

"If you are just working on television, people will think you are old fashioned," Mr. Georges said. "If you are too focused on the future you forget your roots."

There needs to be a balance between channels. Overall, it is about telling a story, sticking to your DNA and not sharing a fake message to consumers.

One component of Bentley's marketing strategy is to be involved with the people who are shaping the future of the world.

The automaker films and shares videos with personalities who can discuss the future in terms of the values of Bentley.

A video released Nov. 28 featured Wing Commander Andy Green who held the world land speed record for the last 15 years. The video showcases the speed of the Bentley Mulsanne.

*Bentley Mulanne Visionaries video with Mr. Green*

“This is an example of shaping ourselves to a vision, not a person,” Mr. Georges said.

Final Take

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