

EVENTS / CAUSES

McLaren exec explains strategy shift from racing to global auto brand

September 19, 2013



By JOE MCCARTHY

NEW YORK - A McLaren executive at the Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2013 yesterday discussed the challenges faced by the brand after its relaunch as an automotive brand in 2011.

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Although McLaren celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, the brand was originally dedicated to racing and still maintains strong ties to the racing world. To extend brand awareness to consumers who are not car enthusiasts, the brand has initiated a series of collaborative events and highly targeted driving events.

"For the initial launch, we were very specific about cars being disseminated more," said Tony Joseph, director of North America for **McLaren Automotive**, New York. "It was no time to build silos."

"McLaren cars have multiple personalities [for different drivers]," he said. "We didn't want to reinvent the wheel, just refine it."

Luxury Daily organized the Luxury Retail Summit: Holiday Focus 2013.

Collaborations and placements

Mr. Joseph explained the unique dilemma McLaren faced as it relaunched itself after being isolated in the racing world for so many years.

First, the brand had a heritage that was largely unknown outside of the racing community, so raising general awareness proved to be a challenge.



Mr. Tony Joseph at The Luxury Retail Summit Sept. 18

Second, the brand did not have established contracts with dealers for distribution in other countries.

After acquiring partnerships with 10 dealers in North America for distribution, the brand began staging events to increase brand awareness.

The brand found great success during video game conferences where fans of racing games marveled at an actual version of a McLaren P1.

Product placement in major films such as "Rush" also brought the brand attention.

Additionally, invite-only unveiling events allowed the brand to target preferred consumers, while still maintaining exclusivity.

Ultimately, the brand found the most success by inviting prospective consumers to drive its vehicles at courses.

McLaren also invites guests to tour its manufacturing facility in London to build brand loyalty.



McLaren Production Center

The automaker has partnered with luxury retailers such as Neiman Marcus to leverage new demographics.

When issuing guidelines to distributors, the brand stressed the importance of accommodating all visitors rather than just elite consumers.

Every dealer is equipped with racing cars and the skeleton of a McLaren vehicle to generate traffic.

Leveraging history

The brand is historically known for its continued success at Formula 1 and its technological innovations.



McLaren Production Center

McLaren's carbon fiber tub chassis innovations have influenced the designs of many automakers.

As it tallied up victories at Formula 1 racing events over the years, the brand developed a concentrated following of ardent car enthusiasts.

In 1999 McLaren Automotive entered a partnership with Daimler to design, develop and manufacture Mercedes-Benz SLR sports car, which entangled the brand's identity with Mercedes-Benz in the minds of many consumers.

In the future, the brand is working to expand its target audience and develop a reputation as a global luxury brand instead of an elite racing enthusiast's brand.

"[The brand is] trying to figure out a manageable relationship with F1," Mr. Joseph said. ""We invite customers to attend F1 races, F1 show meets [to figure out] what we can do, what we can't do."

Final take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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