

INTERNET

Ralph Lauren continues its Olympic partnership to reach a younger, athletic audience

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By SARAH JONES

U.S. apparel brand Ralph Lauren heightened its association with the United States Olympic team with a video featuring a select group of athlete brand ambassadors.

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In the video, the athletes talk about their feelings about participating in the Olympics and representing the U.S. while sporting the apparel Ralph Lauren designed for the team. Ralph Lauren is continuing its legacy of outfitting the U.S. Olympic team, which gives the brand an opportunity to connect itself to the prestige of the games, and connect with fans following the sporting events.

"Ralph Lauren, an iconic American brand built on the promise of quality, excellence, timeless perfection and an elevated standards, looks to build a connection between their brand promise and what it takes to be U.S. Olympians," said Jeff Sopko, vice president for the strategic solutions group at [Baesman](#), Columbus, OH.

"Furthermore, by using actual athletes it adds an element of appearing highly authentic and engaging to the audience," he said.

"Ralph Lauren is looking to use the winter games and its affiliation to connect with as

wide of an audience as possible. However, by default they connect with a similar demographic to the athletes with respect to age, income and interests.

"The posting on the Facebook page further demonstrates the desire to connect with a younger demographic."

Mr. Sopko is not affiliated with Ralph Lauren, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

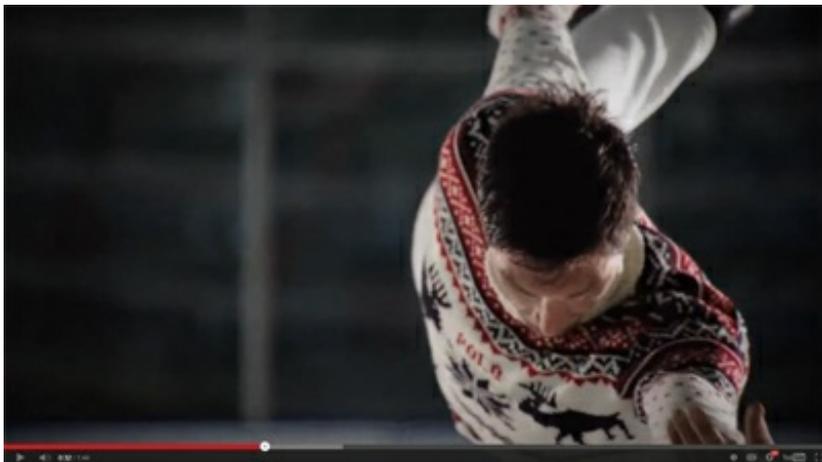
Ralph Lauren did not respond by press deadline.

Athlete spotlight

Ralph Lauren has been designing the uniforms that the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic teams have worn within the Olympic village and at the closing ceremonies since 2008. In addition to the garments made for the team, the same items are available for purchase both online and in stores across the U.S.

The brand posted a video to its Facebook page featuring a group of athletes that the brand chose as its ambassadors for the Olympics, with a message that the brand is the proud outfitter of the 2014 U.S. Olympic team.

Ralph Lauren's "Athletes Master" video shows a number of Olympic team members practicing and talking about the experience of walking in front of thousands of people in the opening ceremony, as well as the determination and mental preparation they need to compete. Hockey player Julie Chu says she cried when she put on her team U.S.A. uniform the first time.



Video still

"The video is clear, personal and believable," said Karen Creamer, president of **K2 Brand Consulting**, Overland Park, KS. "Most importantly, the video features the athletes and apparel in action.

"The end result is strong connection between American Olympians and the Ralph Lauren brand that will appeal to a very broad audience," she said.

Prior to this video, Ralph Lauren had posted features on individual Olympic and Paralympic athletes to its Facebook page, showing the brand ambassadors talking about

their chosen sports.

Shani Davis, an Olympic speedskater, recalled growing up in the south side of Chicago with a single mom, who drove him 45-minutes to the suburbs for practice on school nights.



Go behind the scenes with two-time Olympic Gold Medalist and Ralph Lauren brand ambassador, Shani Davis <http://bit.ly/J7cySn>



Facebook post from Ralph Lauren

Ralph Lauren also profiled Paralympic snowboarder Mike Shea, who spoke of how snowboarding helped him when he lost his leg.



Discover how his sport helped inspire Para-snowboarder Mike Shea to stay positive after he lost his leg <http://bit.ly/19D8KCc>



Facebook post from Ralph Lauren

In all of the videos, every athlete featured wears a complete Ralph Lauren Olympic uniform, showing the range of apparel created, and making the athletes both ambassadors and models.

Ralph Lauren also has a dedicated microsite for the Olympics, where visitors can buy the official Team U.S.A. apparel and watch video profiles of additional athletes.

"The most successful sponsorships go beyond awareness and short-term promotion to generate revenue through long-term sales," Ms. Kreamer said. "The video featuring the U.S. Olympians creates an opportunity for consumers to share in the Olympic experience through storytelling and live the experience through the Ralph Lauren brand and merchandise."

Creating a tradition

This ongoing partnership of Ralph Lauren with the Olympics is an effort to make the brand synonymous with the sporting event.

The lifestyle label created the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Closing Ceremony parade uniforms and village wear for this summer's games in a move likely to maintain brand affinity and position itself as a thought leader during one of the most-watched events every four years.

Since Ralph Lauren is already a monster-sized brand, this placement likely does not have to do with building awareness for products, but for the label's name. Indeed, creating goodwill and a good name for itself could give Ralph Lauren a leg-up over competitors and show the brand as a socially-responsible company ([see story](#)).

Ralph Lauren is not the only brand to use the Olympics as a global platform to gain awareness.

Luxury marketers that partnered with or sponsored the London Olympics 2012 likely gained global awareness.

Marketers including Omega, Ralph Lauren, BMW and Stella McCartney displayed their commitment to the year's Olympic games in London ([see story](#)).

It might be difficult to measure the effect of this partnership for the brand in numeric terms.

"I'm not sure if the video will cause an uptick in sweater sales per se," said Andrew Kelly, director of market development at [Baesman](#), Columbus, OH. "However, the real payoff is that Ralph Lauren gets to elevate its brand so that the Ralph Lauren brand experience becomes synonymous with the 2014 Games, for the U.S. at least.

"Ralph Lauren can neatly attribute the quality of its clothes and authenticity of its brand to the legacy of the Olympics, the Olympic brand, and the privilege and prestige of these outstanding American athletes," he said.

Final Take

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