

EVENTS / CAUSES

Going beyond showroom displays at auto shows

April 22, 2014



BMW display area at NY Auto Show

By JOE MCCARTHY

Although luxury automakers receive immense traffic at auto shows, there are certain tactics that can meaningfully increase engagement.

Sign up now

Luxury Daily

The proximity of so many competitors can diminish the impact of a single brand. Consequently, automakers should incorporate unexpected activities or technologies into their display areas to generate new conversations.

"Powerful, interactive digital elements can educate and impress," said Sam Santarelli, executive vice president of [Brightline Interactive](#), Washington. "They can also reinforce the brand."

"Modern luxury cars constantly tout their technological features, so if their auto show footprint is just the car and some attractive brand ambassadors, there is a serious disconnect," he said.

"You don't want consumers asking themselves, 'if this car is so technologically insane, why is this auto show footprint so weak? I could have seen the same thing for free at the dealer. And gotten a complimentary cup of coffee.'"

Details

Auto shows spur automakers to present their top models in a compelling fashion. A great amount of attention is paid to details such as lighting, carpeting, stage formations, car positioning, types of fencing, arrangement of spokesmen and women and many others.



Lexus display area at New York Auto Show

However, when every automaker attends to details, the abundance of pristine displays can weaken the allure of each individual display. Also, the extensive circuit of auto shows means that events later in the year have less and less in the way of originality.



BMW display area at NY Auto Show

Brands can still overcome the hurdles to engage consumers in fresh ways. Although auto

shows are primarily attended by auto enthusiasts to view cars, brands can set up fun activities for visitors who want to digress for a moment. It is in these moments that unexpected connections can be made.

Simple measures such as photobooths, interactive displays, virtual spokesmen and on-site video games are a few ways to engage and keep the conversation going after the show on social media.

Also, brands should ensure that new digital tools built into cars and new apps are displayed independently for enthusiasts to tinker with.



Audi display area at NY Auto Show

For instance, interactive films that show how a new gadget works solve the problem of how to engage while informing. Plus, the more brand knowledge a consumer leaves the show with, the more likely that he or she will become an advocate in one form or another.

Brands across sectors are leveraging innovative in-store and out-of-home tactics to educate, build awareness and stoke sales.

The “Overstimulated: Winning over the Jaded Audience” session at ad:tech San Francisco explored emerging tactics such as virtual spokesmen, body sensor in-store installations and interactive subway displays. When seeking to create memorable experiences in a crowded retail space, luxury brands are increasingly turning to new technologies to appear innovative ([see story](#)).

Keeping it fresh

Luxury automakers are keeping the momentum going from previous auto shows with mid-level announcements and plenty of brand interaction at the New York Auto Show

Land Rover unveiled the details of its Discovery Sport concept, Bentley solidified plans to return to North American racing and Audi announced the return of the A3 TDI Sportback to the United States. As the official debut of the New York Auto Show commences, brands will work to buoy interest with a series of social media initiatives ([see story](#)).

"Brands at auto shows basically replicate the same showroom experience found at the dealership," Mr. Santarelli said. "Part of the sell is the car's look, so simply displaying it at the auto show is natural.

"But another part of the sell is in the car's technological features," he said. "And as technology in cars increases exponentially every year, communicating these features in a clear, understandable way is difficult.

"Manufacturers need to invest in simple, but visually powerful ways to demonstrate these technological wonders. Brightline has been developing a number of storefront digital interactives that let customers interact with the physical product behind a touchscreen-enabled store window. By doing this, automakers could allow consumers to see and experience the car's technology while still seeing the beauty of the car."

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

Embedded Video: [//www.youtube.com/embed/lFiC_Z_pGqA](https://www.youtube.com/embed/lFiC_Z_pGqA)

© Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.