

MEDIA

Awear Smart Chips Bring Internet to Fashion

- The brand uses a low-energy bluetooth chip that could help brands reward customers for wearing their products.

BY RACHEL STRUGATZ

Awear Solutions is using technology to build a frequent flyer program for fashion.

Liron Slonimsky and Oren Zoner, cofounders and cochief executive officers of the technology company – which has developed a button-sized, low-energy bluetooth chip and a corresponding app – want to help brands engage in a two-way dialogue with consumers while also gathering valuable intelligence.

The smart tag developed by the company and embedded into a purchase can communicate with the app, if users choose to opt in.

“The brand incentivizes [customers] to do whatever they are doing, but [while] carrying the product. Regular consumers are already the brand ambassadors,” Slonimsky said. By using the technology, brands can offer customers perks for taking looks out of the closet, including discounts on future purchases to access to pre-sales. “Essentially, it’s mobilizing consumers in a way that brands have mobilized bloggers, but at a larger scale.”

The venture has raised a seed round of over \$1 million from angel investors in New York City and Slonimsky and



Liron Slonimsky and Oren Zoner, cofounders and co-chief executive officers of Awear Solutions.

Zoner’s native Israel, including lead investor Eddy Shalev, founder of Genesis Partners, a leading venture capital firm in Herzliya, Israel. Slonimsky said she will start raising a Series A shortly. Awear did a pilot with a U.K.-based accessories company a few months ago and just signed their first U.S. brand to debut the technology this fall.

“It makes the brand and consumer relationship an active one, not a passive

one,” said Aliza Licht, a strategic advisor for the company, who stressed that data is being collected about the product, not the customer. “It’s information for the brands. They detect the popularity of different styles, colors and models in different locations and different use cases.”

Beyond the gathering of data, Awear wants to extend the conversation with the consumer throughout the product’s

life cycle. Most communication with the shopper stops after the item leaves the store, and Slonimsky wants to change this. While the technology does not collect any consumer information – users don’t provide their e-mail or sign in with social media – the Awear app is able to locate the smart product and communicate with the unique tag.

“If a brand is coming out with a new bag and Coachella is around the corner, they can push notifications to anyone who has that bag and say, ‘If you’re going to Coachella and you’re wearing this product, you will have access to our VIP Wi-Fi lounge or whatever the activation is,’” Slonimsky said.

Brands can also benefit by learning more about where their looks are being worn.

Slonimsky declined to say what firm tested out Awear earlier this year, but she said early insights are already proving valuable. For instance, a handbag that was thought to be an evening style was actually not used much after 5 p.m., according to consumers who opted in to the technology.

“All of these consumers were driving to work and not taking the subway, so if a brand was doing a big advertising campaign in the subway, this would force them to rethink their advertising and perhaps maybe do radio,” Slonimsky said. Knowing how a specific item is being worn will also help the brand better suggest complementary products.

“It takes marketing and advertising and makes it smart,” Slonimsky said.

BUSINESS

Kering Renews Pact With HEC Paris



Kering chief François-Henri Pinault is an alumnus of HEC Paris.

- The group is to sponsor the Luxury Certificate program at the elite School of Management.

BY MILES SOCHA

PARIS – A proud alumnus of HEC Paris, Kering chairman and chief executive François-Henri Pinault has rekindled his group’s ties with the elite French business school.

Kering said it would sponsor its Luxury Certificate program and continue its partnership with the HEC Foundation for another five years.

Forty students representing 14 nationalities are to follow the certificate

program from April through June, hearing seminars led by Kering managers and visiting the boutiques of its luxury brands, which include Gucci, Bottega Veneta, Saint Laurent and Boucheron.

Pinault said the program is meant to “train future leaders of the luxury industry” and identify talented individuals it could potentially hire.

It includes courses given by HEC professors; an in-depth look at the sector with industry experts; a “game” involving developing a luxury company, and a project on a dedicated topic put forth by Kering and presented to a jury.

Professors in the program include Patrick Albaladejo, previously senior vice president in charge of strategy and image at Hermès International.

According to Peter Todd, dean of HEC, Kering has committed to put forth 20 experts from its brands to “share their insights with students.” He trumpeted “audacity and entrepreneurship” as values shared by the school and the world’s third-largest luxury conglomerate.

Kering first established ties with HEC’s school of management in 2010 around its Luxury Chair.

Founded in 1881, HEC Paris boasts a faculty of 138 full-time professors; counts 4,000 students, and trains more than 8,000 managers and executives annually.