



Supply chains: Smart cars

Smart thinking

Joachim Eberhardt, MD, Daimler-Chrysler, UK:

Ladies and gentlemen, please can I ask you to join me in welcoming a wallet-friendly, city-friendly, piece of road joy to the UK. I present you the official UK Smart city

Commentary:

We're at the Motor Show and this is the UK launch of a new brand. The splendidly unreconstructed emphasis on sixties-style dolly birds to sell cars is quite deliberate. As you'll see, the fun lifestyle values being suggested emphasise marketing the brand rather than the car. Under the wraps is the Smart car. If the bright colours and the vibrant styling remind you of, say, Swatch watches, that's not entirely an accident. Smart, a new brand from Mercedes, part of Daimler-Chrysler, came about from the co-operation of two distinct manufacturers. Smart breaks down as SM-art, M is Mercedes, S is Swatch. Watches are more similar to cars than you might think. In both cases the market is saturated. Everyone who wants one has got one. The market is in replacement and trading up. Or is it? Switzerland, home of democracy and the cuckoo clock, had already recognised the threat to its watch industry. Cheap Japanese manufacturing methods were the threat.

Nicolas Hayek, Founder of Swatch:

There was a period where we European, including British people, were being told we were degenerated, we were not capable of fighting back, we were not capable of being entrepreneur, we had no new ideas, everybody in Asia and Japan was more clever than we are, and then somebody comes from the most expensive country in the world and proves that, by god, we can fight it, and we can win.

Commentary:

Nicolas Hayek was talking about watches. We were interested in cars.

Joachim Eberhardt, MD, Daimler-Chrysler, UK:

We started Smart about two-and-a-half years ago officially in Europe, and it was really a joint venture between Swatch at the time and Daimler-Chrysler, or Mercedes-Benz at the time. To come up with a numerability concept, you know, playing to all the needs of the modern consumer from a lifestyle perspective, from an ecological perspective, from which it said there is room for a new vehicle concept that nobody else has done before and this is the result.

Commentary:

The result is a modest, eco-friendly two-seater, with a 600cc engine and a light body, it's fuel efficient. It's also made from components, 80% of which can be recycled. Like Swatches the Smart comes in fun, lifestyle colours, and if you don't like the one you've got you can change it.

Joachim Eberhardt, MD, Daimler-Chrysler, UK:

It is quite easy to change the panels, it takes less than an hour to do so, so overnight you could theoretically have a brand new vehicle. So even when you resell the vehicle also you might want to freshen it up, you might want to put some new panels on to give it really an almost brand new look again.

Commentary:

Changing the appearance of your possessions is something Swatch have promoted for years. It's part of Swatchness.

John Sorrell, Design Council:

The Swatchness is the identity of Swatch. It's the way they do what they do, it's who they are, it's how they produce their products, it's the way they behave as an organisation, it's the way in which Swatch are going.

Commentary:

In fact, the parallel between Swatches and Smart is so close that you'd be hard pressed to tell what these people are talking about.

Vox Pops:

Reliability. Colourful. Cheap and cheerful.

Commentary:

In fact:

Vox Pops:

It means an instant watch you don't have to worry about, you can do anything with it, lose it and you don't really mind because it's reasonably priced.

I can take it anywhere and I can fall into pools and not have to worry about it.

Commentary:

The sixties retro hype suggests, probably correctly, that Smart are trying to tap into the wave of affection that greeted the original Mini.

Vox Pops:

Well I own an Audi A6 and a Porsche and I came straight here to look at these. These are more fun.

Well I don't own a Smart car, I can't wait to drive in one, but I particularly would like a glitter one.

Smart's an absolute ball to drive. I've driven it on motorways and in urban situations, and it's going back to driving an old Mini, it's just sheer fun.

Commentary:

As a vehicle the Smart car would seem to have some competition, especially at the 2000 Motor Show. Most manufacturers offer the small urban runabout that's fun to drive, and there's no shortage of two-seaters with minimal luggage capacity at the opposite end of the market. Swatch, the word, that is, not the watch, gives you the clue to the way that Smart wants their branding to work. It's the second watch that Swatch is targeting, the watch as a fashion accessory to change with your mood. And that lifestyle approach is how Smart want to work too, the additional car.

Daniel Preiss, Smart Dealer, Saarbrücken:

We have a lot of Mercedes driver because there is eh, or a Porsche driver also because of use of motor car, if it is nice weather outside they make weekend, holiday, but for the normal vehicle it is classed as a town, so they take it as a small car because of the places, to park places in the town, so a lot of young people, and a lot of women also drive the car because it's the best car to have if you have two cars in the family, that's the best second car that you can buy.

Joachim Eberhardt, MD, Daimler-Chrysler, UK:

On average there is only 1.2 people in a vehicle and the rest, I don't want to say is wasted space but you really don't need it, so we take it we need to have a vehicle that makes maximum use of space but provides an alternative transportation for our consumers, and an on top of everything is fun.