Wanna, with Natalia Vodianova as angel investor, lures luxe partners with unique AR

By Godfrey Deeny - 12 February 2021

With many fashion and luxury houses struggling to make ends meet in the pandemic, it was refreshing to speak with Sergey Arkhangelskiy, whose new Assisted Reality technology start-up Wanna – which is working with the likes of Gucci, Farfetch and Puma – is aiming for a 200% growth rate this year.

Based primarily in Belarus, Wanna, which includes the apps Wanna Watch, Wanna Kicks and Wanna Nails - has attracted plenty of attention with its smart try-on AR technology, and for its backers. Supermodel Natalia Vodianova is both an angel investor and brand promoter.

Launched in 2017, Wanna signed with Gucci last summer, and launched its technology in early August, which allows customers to try on sneakers virtually and see watches wrapped around their wrists. Now, they also work with Browns, the famed London boutique, using their technology to give clients a virtual experience. Revenue comes from monthly charges to the luxury brands or e-tailers for use of the technology.

“We have different scales, from the middle thousands per month to up to €20,000 depending on the complexity of project,” explained Arkhangelskiy, a computer science graduate who lives in Moscow.

Last year, Wanna scored revenues of around €1 million from monthly license fees and expects to be triple that size in 2021. With some 15 paying clients including La Moda in Russia, The Iconic in Australia, and Goat.com, the American sneaker platform, in which Artemis, the Pinault family investment vehicle, just invested.

“Covid has been really good for our type of technological solution. Which is all based on propriety technology we control. Potential rivals can come along, so we have to run and keeping improving the technology; and the stability and quality of images. We want to be the provider for all the industry,” smiled Arkhangelskiy, a decade-long Google veteran, including three years with the internet giant in Silicon Valley.

Vodianova’s role as an angel investor – with an undisclosed stake – helps connect the brand to major industry players. “Natalia is very well connected,” concedes Arkhangelskiy, who manages 45 people dispersed around Minsk, Ukraine, Lithuania and even a few expat Russians in Paris. Its principal shareholder and chief product officer is Boris Khvostichenko, while Palta.com is significant investor.

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Wanna first tested its technology with images of women putting on nail varnish, though Arkhangelsky admits the “holy grail” of developing truly advanced AR is for people to try on clothes. Wanna sees significant growth potential in the watch industry, especially as the pandemic forced the closure of all major watch salons.

“The watch industry is under great pressure to innovate and we can help with this. Watches are clearly bought by an older consumer, but the new generation, which is much more technically savvy, gets much more engaged with our sort of technology. So, we can help broaden the market,” insisted the executive, who has now partnered with major league watch marques. Wanna Watch’s own demo app allows one to visualize a $23,900 Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso or $7,000 IWC Portugieser Chronograph from the comfort of your own desk. The watch even rotates with your wrist.

Wanna claims that luxe partners like Snapchat, Puma and Allbirds have enjoyed 3x user base increases; 5x increases in the average session time and 4x rises for product page share rate.

Given the hacks on American political parties and even major departments of state, was Sergey not concerned that brands could be suspicious of Wanna?

“Not at all. We are completely independent of any government, and in the end, our technology speaks for itself,” he concluded.