

# A Time For A Change

## Web-designed content may be the destiny of commercial advertising. Rolex's new photography campaign offers a panorama of what the future holds.



By Dave Willis, Photography by Stephen Frink, Location Photos by Carl Lukasewich and Philippe Clairo

While Web-based sales get bigger and bigger, companies are focusing on advertisement solely for an Internet-based constituency. New ad techniques are being birthed directly for the Web, and the possibilities of computer and mechanical technologies are being put to the test with every fresh idea. A new campaign by Rolex, its Extraordinary Watches series, is designed to showcase nine distinctive Oyster Perpetual models. Each set incorporates an omnidirectional display, encompassing the “world” of each watch by presenting video, animation and still-photography interpretations of its lifestyle and particular advantages.



Stephen Frink is among the world's most prominent talents in the field of underwater photography, so it's no coincidence that Rolex tapped him to shoot a panorama-style animation for the Submariner, one of Rolex's model dive watches. Safely submersible to depths of up to 1,000 feet, it was Rolex's goal to show the Submariner in the ideal ocean environment, and it was Frink's job to take a Matrix-style panoramic sequence of shots highlighting the perfect setting for a beautiful watch.

“When this particular project came up,” says Frink, “they called me because my background, obviously, is in marine photography and the places people go for scuba. I'm very well connected with dive operators and resort infrastructure throughout the tropical world, and my ability to choose the right location was important. My assignment began with the research—where to go when the criteria involves beautiful beaches, reasonably easy access and consistent sunshine and blue water.”

Originally conceived as an animation that was to revolve in a 180-degree arc around the Submariner, Frink was to take images in five-degree increments and then hand them over to Critical Mass, the post and Web design firm responsible for the Rolex Website. Indicative of how important postproduction is to the entire photography process in the days of digital, Critical Mass was to be involved in the complete project, from scouting to capture to edit.

“Having our eyes there instead of on a set of instructions allowed for instant decisions when we were searching for a location,” says Critical Mass art director Carl Lukasewich. “We were able to instantly look at a beach and know whether it had enough flat sand or geographic details to make the shot interesting in a 180-degree panorama. This allowed Frink to do his job rather than guessing about what

we needed. We chose the location, and he supplied the imaging expertise. Because of digital, we were able to see right away if our shooting was going to work.”

Frink adds, “I lucked out in that I was the last of these series of shots to be booked. That meant I had the benefit of the collective knowledge of the shooters who had come before me on the project. For every watch that’s part of the Extraordinary Watches campaign, they had someone shooting these rotational panoramas somewhere in the world using this same tripod sequence so that they could rotate completely around this virtual watch. The watch shot clearly had to be done in the controlled conditions of the studio. For one thing, it would be really difficult to control the light, and Rolex is obviously very demanding about how their watches should appear in photographs. Even beyond that, the shadows would have been a problem, either from the watch or the tripod or the background.

“We had two tripods that were connected by the rods and Magic Arms,” he continues. “The short tripod behind the main one really does nothing, except to keep the front tripod stable. We couldn’t use three legs, as one would normally with a tripod setup, because the third leg would be in the view of the camera. Since we could only use two legs on the primary tripod, the shorter unit is just to provide stability to the primary. The sandbags are obviously to keep that one stable.”

Frink tries to shoot as much as he can in real time before handing the project over. “Yes, I know that people could do the whole composite in Photoshop. They could take a studio shot of the watch and immerse it into one of my underwater photos. But I’ve had very good luck shooting the real thing, and the depth of field is more believable my way. The product jumps out against the background, ultrasharp on the product and soft in the background.”

“Once the shooting was over,” Lukasevich notes, “we chose the best shots that suited our needs, and they were all good. We were in control of the image manipulation and artistic decisions as we needed to fulfill certain aesthetic and technical requirements, such as file size and animation needs.”

Shockingly, despite Rolex’s reputation for intense detail, both parties agreed that Rolex allowed Frink almost complete autonomy in every respect. Frink notes, “In my experience with Rolex, they hire a person because they admire the work they’ve done. They’re not controlling or restrictive in that regard. I think they’re used to dealing with creative people, and they try to give you room to express your creativity.”

Ultimately, the idea of a 180-degree animation was dropped in favor of a swiveling three-frame panorama because of the large imagery and the issues with Internet performance. Even so, and despite nine different photographers in nine different areas of the world, the nine watch subsets in the Extraordinary Watches campaign fit together like a seamless and aesthetic marvel, similar to a well-designed timepiece.

The Web offers potential as endless as the wide-ranging content of the Internet itself. Ad campaigns are evolving in new ways to meet the new challenges that arise even as new solutions appear. By keeping ahead of the curve, by pitching ideas and designs and answers that meet and exceed standards, today’s campaign could become tomorrow’s formula.

*To see the **Extraordinary Watches** series, visit [www.rolex.com](http://www.rolex.com). Explore the underwater photography of **Stephen Frink** at [www.stephenfrink.com](http://www.stephenfrink.com). Contact **Critical Mass** at [www.criticalmass.com](http://www.criticalmass.com).*

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