
Swatch Watch

Second Watch, Swiss Watch

In the 1970s, the Swiss watch industry faced devastating foreign competition, first from the U.S., then from Japan and Hong Kong. The Swiss response: intensive R & D and marketing efforts, yielding the Swatch.

The goal was to reach beyond the luxury watch market where the Swiss were still strong. For the global mass market they needed to move away from mechanical watches, and produce electronic quartz watches with high quality but low price. They needed to appeal to young people. By improving materials and reducing components, they made the basic Swatch increasingly thinner, cheaper, and more versatile.

The name “Swatch” was the brainchild of a New York advertising agency in 1981. The concept: this new Swiss watch would also be one’s “second watch”—an affordable fashion accessory. The original target was the American market. However, in 1983, the first twelve Swatches debuted in Switzerland, Germany, and Great Britain. The very first Swatch had a black plastic strap and a plain face.

Soon, Swatch offered endless variety: fun colors and playful patterns, seasonal collections, limited editions. The designs have ranged from classic and conservative to original, innovative, even futuristic. The standard practice has been to offer two main collections each year. For this, some 75 models are selected from as many as 500 designs. They are given names rather than product numbers: Calypso Beach (1986), Lolita (1995), Instantaneous Fresh (2006). Individual watches belong to thematic families: *Street Smart*; *Jelly in Jelly*; *Spicy Whispers*. The Swatch Design Lab, established in Milan in 1989, oversees all aspects of design. Catchy advertising slogans have urged us to “Switch to Swatch.”

Popular Swatch series include the sports timekeeping Chrono, the Scuba, the metal-bodied Irony, and the ultra-flat Skin. The Paparazzi series can download data on stocks, weather, news, etc. from the Internet. From time to time, Swatch Specials appear, such as the egg-colored Eggsdream of 1994, or the Olympic collections starting in 1996 (when Swatch became the Official Timekeeper at the Atlanta Games). Swatch has also spun off a children’s line, called Flik Flak, and a jewelry/accessory line, called Dress Your Body (DYB).