Luxottica Signs Intel Deal for Wearable Tech

MILAN — Luxottica Group has its eyes set on making wearable technology stylish. The Italian eyewear designer, manufacturer and distributor — which counts Ray-Ban, Persol and Oliver Peoples among its house brands and Prada, Versace, Giorgio Armani and Polo Ralph Lauren among its licensees — has just signed a long-term deal with Intel for the research and development of high-tech glasses. The first product resulting from the collaboration is expected to debut in 2015.

“Our thought is that, today, it’s an opportunity we can’t miss,” Luxottica chief executive officer Massimo Vian told WWD, noting that he and other Luxottica executives envision a future in which wearable eyewear — and other multifunctional gadgets — are a leading market trend.

Investing in research and development now will allow the eyewear firm, which prides itself on innovation, to stay ahead of the competition in responding to clients’ request for specific tech features. “We not only want to test the wearable [segment], but we want to stay there,” Vian added.

Each product developed with Intel will be rigorously tested, and subcontracts will determine the investments of each partner.

Although he acknowledged that current media coverage of high-tech eyewear has focused on their lack of aesthetic appeal, Vian was adamant that Luxottica would be able to improve on this aspect and that applications would quickly become less invasive.

“We will never compromise our design,” Vian said, emphasizing that the “look and beauty” of eyewear are paramount for Luxottica, which will retain full control of its products’ style.

Noting that wearable technology is a booming sector, Intel chief executive Brian Krzanich said the partnership with Luxottica would “bring together Intel’s leading-edge silicon and software technology with Luxottica’s design innovation and consumer expertise.”

Luxottica is positioning itself as a dominant player in the emerging field of technological eyewear: Last March, the firm inked a U.S.-based agreement with Google for the consumer launch of the Internet firm’s Glass product.

Intel, meanwhile, is making an aggressive push into the sector, having missed the boat somewhat on semiconductor products for smartphones and tablets. The company earlier this fall sponsored its first “Make It Wearable” global challenge to identify and foster innovation in the sector. Nixie, the winner of the top $500,000 prize, is the first wearable camera — it attaches to the wrist like a watch — that can fly, composing the perfect shot from an aerial perspective and returning to the user like a boomerang.

Intel also teamed with Opening Ceremony to develop the MICA (My Intelligent Communications Accessory) bracelet, which is retailing for $495 at Barneys New York and Opening Ceremony.

Steve Holmes, vice president of Intel’s new devices group, told the WWD CEO Summit in New York in October that wearable technology products “have to become objects of desire. That’s why Intel is interested in working with the fashion industry.” Analysts estimate wearable technology could be a 278 million-unit industry by 2017.

The stakes are high: On Wednesday at The New York Times International Luxury Conference in Miami, Krzanich said, “We think wearables can grow into a multibillion-dollar business for us.”